PlayStation 3 PlayStation Portable PlayStation Network PlayStation 2

PlayStation®

JANUARY 09

The Official Magazine

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TOP 10 GAMES OF 2009

God of War III

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 15 (January 2009)

+

REVIEWED!
Resistance 2
Prince of Persia
And 14 MORE!

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devs help you make
better levels

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F.E.A.R. 2

PROJECT ORIGIN™

Exclusive hands-on with
the *shocking shooter*

BEST AND WORST
Songs to
download for
ROCK BAND

Future
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THE ORIGINAL
SALT

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January 2009

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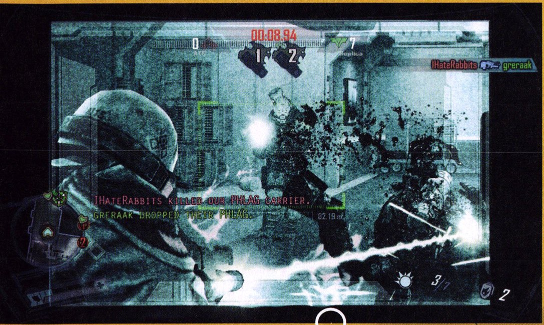
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IHateRabbits
greraak
IHateRabbits killed our PHLAG carrier.
greraak dropped their PHLAG.
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Shhh. Be vewwy quiet.
We're hunting for wabbits!

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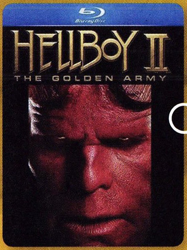
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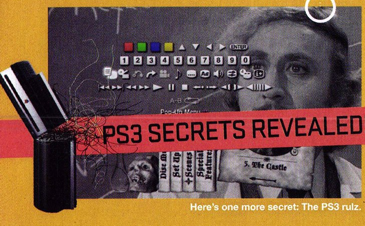
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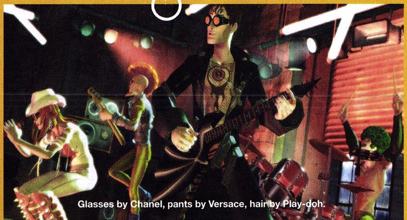
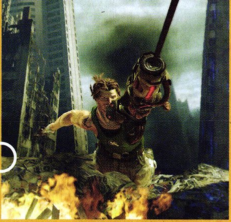
Here's one more secret: The PS3 rulz.



Glasses by Chanel, pants by Versace, hair by Play-doh.



Spider-man, Spider-man, does whatever a spider can. Spins a web—oh. Hang on. Wrong game.

"My hands are so soft, Mr. Sparkly Cloud? That's because I've been soaking in Palmolive."

Free advice: If you want to win the battle, don't send in a squadron of little people.

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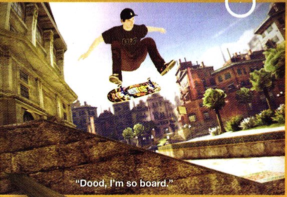
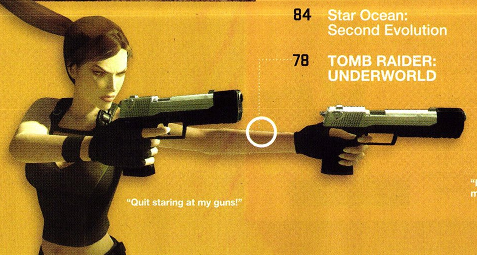
We don't need the Lasso of Truth to tell you those thighs are easy on the eyes.



"Dood, I'm so board."



"Quit staring at my guns!"

"Humans make me gassy."

Editor's Note

"I think I must have one of those faces you can't help believing."

Honestly, I thought it was odd, premature even, that Jack Tretton described 2008 as the "Year of the PS3" during his E3 press conference address. Having made such a forceful statement of the PlayStation 2's longevity—that saw such technology-pushing hits as *God of War 2* and *Shadow of the Colossus* appearing several years into the lifespan—and with a stated 10-year plan for PS3, it's clear to all observers that the best really is yet to come. How can we say so with such authority? Because we've peaked a little into the future, and what we've seen is good. In fact, whittling down our starting list to the 10 top picks was a challenge in itself. It was testimony to the enduring potential of the system—and some of the franchises we've adopted as our standard-bearers—that we had to make painful decisions to omit some favorites. But we also wanted to make sure that we shone a light on a few that you might not have immediately considered as you construct your own personal choices.

We also had to peer into the black hole of release dates to wager whether such sure-fire hits as *Gran Turismo 5, Uncharted 2, Final Fantasy XIII,* and *M.A.G* would hit in 2009. We hope so, but our best official information couldn't make that final determination by press time. But we did shake the tree to uncover a couple of gems that we're thrilled to include on the list.

“*F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin* promises unique twists on your typical action gameplay, and you can read all about Tizzy's hallucinations.”

And that's not to mention the potential of our cover showcase this month. All the big, brave men folk at PTOM Towers hid behind their monitors as I cast around for volunteers for this story. Teresa steeled herself against her inner fears, and traveled to Seattle to have the bejeezus scared out of her by the friendly folks at Monolith. *F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin* promises unique twists on your typical action gameplay, and you can read all about Tizzy's hallucinations (and thoughts on the game) on page 26.

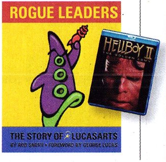
The great holiday review round-up also continues apace as we give our view on Insomniac's *Resistance 2,* Ubisoft's *Prince of Persia,* Treyarch's *Call of Duty: World at War,* and more. Keep your feedback coming, and enjoy the issue.

Rob

"Quote" contest—Special Bonus Prize!

If you're looking closely, with a cynical eye, you might just view this very special quote contest prize as yet another example of shameless self-promotion within the pages of PTOM. But you'd be missing the fact that this is quite a deal! Yes, for regular readers the quote contest is still in place: identify the movie that the line at the top of this column is lifted from, and send your answer in an email (along with your name and mailing address) to **PTOM_editor@futureus.com.** One lucky, randomly chosen winner will receive a Blu-ray movie straight from the detritus piled on my desk. But that same lucky winner will also receive a copy—straight from my very own limited pile—of my book, *Rogue Leaders: The Story of LucasArts.* At the very least, it's hefty enough at 256 hardbound pages to squish small to medium-sized bugs. And if you open the sweet four-panel lenticular cover (that blends between Darth Vader, Guybrush Threepwood, LEGO Indy, and the Purple Tentacle) you'll find out all kinds of fascinating nuggets from the 25-plus years of LucasArts history. Let me know in your entry if, should you be so lucky to be selected the winner, you want me to graffiti the inside cover on your behalf!

So I suppose that Joseph Kulikowski of Parma, OH should be thrilled that he correctly identified last month's quote from the brilliant movie *The Full Monty* (set in my home town), but feel just a tad disappointed he didn't win this current month's contest that would also have scored him the book. But fear not, Joseph, you can go to **http://tinyurl.com/68ljlx** to get yourself a copy (or find it on Amazon, and other reputable book-selling emporiums.) **</shameless plug>**



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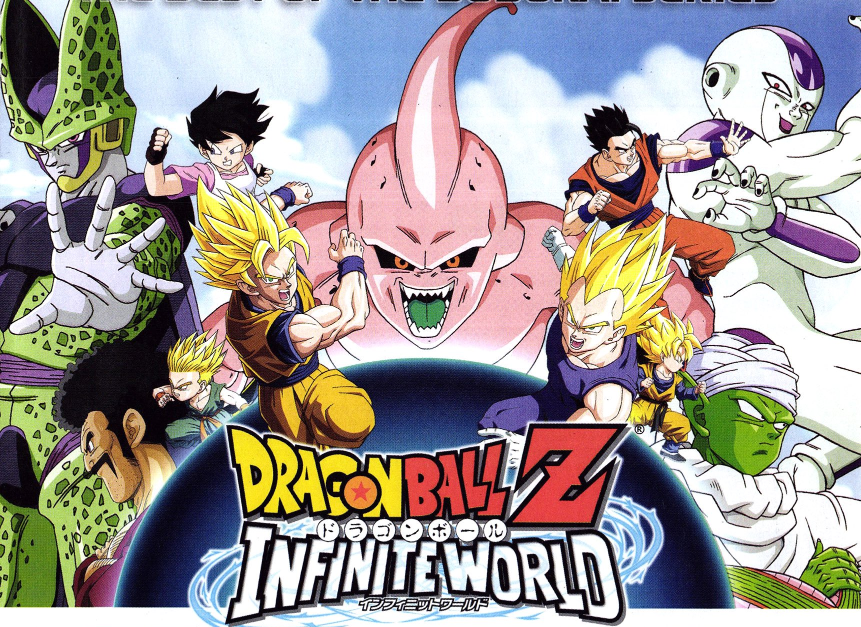
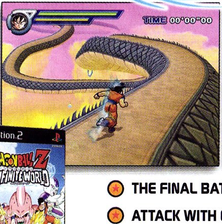

DRAGON BALL Z
ドラゴンボール
INFINITE WORLD
インフィニットワールド



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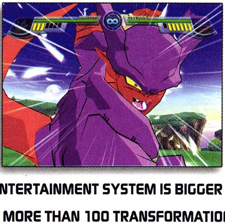
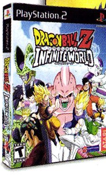
FIRST ATTACK





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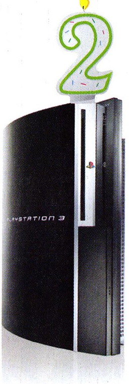
BIRTHDAY BASH!

PICKING UP STEAM

The PS3's second birthday has come and gone, but we take a moment to acknowledge all that the system has accomplished so far, and peek at where it's heading. Remember: this is just the beginning!



A 10-year life expectancy. That's a long time for a console to sit in your living room entertainment center, but that's how long Sony expects the PS3 to be around. And looking at the PlayStation family's track record—the PS2 is inching toward its 9th birthday, with over 140 million units sold—we have no reason to doubt it.

Two years in, and already we've seen the PS3's functionality adapt and evolve to fit its user's needs. Trophies, Life with PlayStation, an upgraded PlayStation Store, expanded Blu-ray support, not to mention an arsenal of games, both on Blu-ray and downloadable. We think that's more than enough reason to celebrate, so we took some time to chat with John Koller, Director of Hardware Marketing at SCEA, to dissect some hard facts and numbers to give you a grasp of where the PS3's been, and more importantly, where it's headed.

Koller Konsiderations

John Koller
Director, Hardware Marketing

"Seven out of ten Blu-ray players is a PS3!" -Koller

What would you say is the significance of the PS3's 2nd anniversary?

I would say it's our place in the software market. Both first and third party software is in a strong position, with strong sales.

There's been a significant increase in both the quality and the types of games available for PS3. Since the system's launch, there's been a lot of educating on what the PS3 can do, on the type of full-featured, extremely high-tech power of the system.

You'll start to see more developers heading toward the PS3 direction, taking advantage of "Blu-ray gaming." That is, using the 50GB size of the Blu-ray to their advantage. All that space really allows a great canvas for game development.

Looking ahead, what will be the PS3's focus in the coming year?

Our focus for this next year is going to be on the PlayStation Network and on remote play with the PSP. When we launched the PS3, we wanted it to be a digital living room hub. With the PSP, we want it to be a portable digital living room. So our goal is to connect those two stories, to allow the consumer who owns both to take their content on the road as well as to enjoy it at home in full HD glory. We are focusing on tighter tie-in with those two elements this year.

Also, the new 160GB *Uncharted* PS3 bundle gives a nod toward the need for more space with all the downloadable content soon to be available.

Do you have any messages for readers about this milestone?

We certainly want to thank PS3 owners! Their good guidance is shortly going to be rewarded with a plethora of games and Blu-ray content. For those who have not jumped on board yet, there's no better time! We keep emphasizing, the PS3 is a 10-year product. Its life cycle is just going into year three now. The future forward value is fantastic…it's a great time to get in!

Timeline

NOVEMBER 17, 2006
The PS3 launches

JANUARY 2007
One million PS3 units ship to the U.S.

MAY 2007
Support for Remote Play implemented (allows content to be shared between PS3 and PSP)

OCTOBER 2007
PS3 cancer-curing application, Folding@home, recognized by the Guinness World Records as the most powerful distributed computing cluster in the world

FEBRUARY 2008
Blu-ray wins the HD format war

MARCH 2008
BD-Live Profile 2.0 now supported

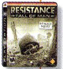
> "We do a lot of focus testing, often with people who own a Wii or Xbox 360, but not a PS3. But after testing the PS3, all of our test groups believe that the PS3 will eventually be the leader of this generation. Their belief is the long-term viability of the PS3, because they believe that PlayStation is the brand that takes hold of the console market." –John Koller

Quick 'N' Dirty PS3 Reference Chart

Model (in order of release)	Colors	# of USB ports	PS2 Compatible?	Flash Card Reader?	802.11 b/g Wi-Fi	Price and Availability
20GB (Nov 2006)	Piano Black	4	Yes (Emotion Engine)	No	No	$499. Discontinued. Good luck finding it new, even on eBay!
60GB (Nov 2006)	Piano Black	4	Yes (Emotion Engine)	Yes	Yes	$599. Discontinued. New on eBay: at least $900. This rare model is the best for those interested in maximum PS2 compatibility.
80GB (August 2007)	Piano Black	4	Yes (emulation)	Yes	Yes	$499. Discontinued. This model's best bundle is the *MGS4* bundle. New on eBay: at least $600. (Not to be confused with the new 80GB model (below), which does not feature any PS2 compatibility.)
40GB (Nov 2007)	Piano Black, Gun-Metal Gray	2	No	No	Yes	$399. Discontinued. Easily found new on eBay or Amazon for around $450. The gun-metal gray version is included in Konami's own *MGS4* bundle, for $200 extra. (We saw it on Amazon for $400!) Yes, there are two different *MGS4* bundles! Satin silver and ceramic white versions available in Japan (or on eBay for around $450).
80GB (Aug 2008)	Piano Black	2	No	No	Yes	$399. At retailers everywhere. (Better than the earlier, similarly priced 40GB version, unless you want a special color.)
160GB (Nov 2008)	Piano Black	2	No	No	Yes	$499. At retailers everywhere. Bundled with a copy of *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune.*

Oh, glorious gaming

What kind of PS3 celebration would this be, if we didn't give a nod toward the games that have helped to make the system so great? Here are our picks of the must-have PS3 exclusives from the past two years. These are the games that have defined the PS3 experience. (Hint: If you still haven't played them, you're missing out.)



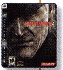
Resistance: Fall of Man
$29.99 | Nov 2006
The PS3's definitive launch title.

Ratchet and Clank Future: Tools of Destruction
$59.99 | Oct 2007
Platforming perfection in gorgeous high definition.

Uncharted: Drake's Fortune
$59.99 | Nov 2007
Witty dialogue, spunky characters, intriguing storyline. A third-person shooter that's like watching an *Indiana Jones* film.

Everyday Shooter
$9.99 (PSN) | Oct 2007
A single man's ambition led to visually and aurally stunning dual-analog shooter.

PixelJunk Monsters
$9.99 (PSN) | Jan 2008
A tower defense game that will drive you crazy. In a good way.

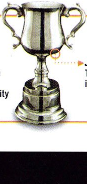


Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots
$49.99 | June 2008
The epic, stealth- and intrigue-filled conclusion to Snake's story.

LittleBigPlanet
$59.99 | Oct 2008
The most charming game on the PS3 to date! The best part? Swapping user-created levels with people all over the world.

APRIL 2008
DualShock 3 released in the U.S.

APRIL 2008
PlayStation Store on the PS3 redesigned for easier functionality



JULY 2008
Trophies released in firmware 2.40

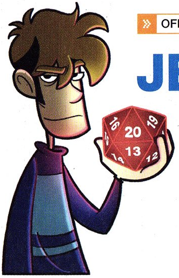
NEW ARRIVALS
10,000 BC
ROBOT CHICKEN

JULY 2008
Video delivery service added to the PlayStation Store

SEPTEMBER 2008
Folding@home becomes *Life with PlayStation*

OCTOBER 2008
In-game screenshots now available for supported games

OCTOBER 2008
Official Bluetooth headset for the PS3 released



» OFFICIAL PLAYSTATION INTERVIEW

JERRY HOLKINS a.k.a. TYCHO BRAHE

When they'd finally heard one too many uninformed tirades linking videogames to violent behavior, writer Jerry Holkins and artist Mike Krahulik of the hugely popular Penny Arcade webcomic decided to do something about it. In 2003, they created the Child's Play Charity—an annual toy drive for children's hospitals that works with over 50 medical centers in six different countries, providing patients with everything from brand-new handheld game consoles to good old-fashioned crayons. Five years and over two million dollars in donations later, Holkins gives us an inside look at gaming's most altruistic organization.

PTOM: The charity was founded in part as a means of refuting negative perceptions of gamers. To what extent do you feel it has accomplished this?

JERRY HOLKINS: That might have been the original mission, but that didn't last very long. Even before the first drive ended, it seemed like a very hollow goal. When we were loading a semi with games and toys at six in the morning, before the sun had even come up, the giving itself became the focus. People can think whatever they want to. And while they do, the gaming community will quietly improve the lives of young people in bad situations.

What does it take to make Child's Play happen every year? How large is the staff that works on this project?

Well, all the people who work here at Penny Arcade also work on Child's Play—we just move our focus to it over the holidays. That's nine people who help whenever they need to, but since the first year the process is largely automated by the Amazon Wish Lists. The first time around, we had to store all the toys in Gabe's house because Seattle Children's Hospital didn't know who we were and didn't know what gamers could accomplish. Suffice it to say, they know now. The best way people can help is to donate toys to the hospital closest to them.

Back when the charity first started, I remember seeing pictures of you and Mike hand-loading trucks full of toys. How has the process changed since then? Have you attempted to maintain this hands-on approach?

Even if we wanted to, we couldn't. Take a look at childsplaycharity.org, and look how big this thing got in just a few years. We support hospitals in Australia, the U.K., and Egypt! It might be tough to get out there. Our focus is on the Wish Lists themselves, the community events, and the Charity Dinner and Auction we run here in Seattle.

Have you ever had a chance to visit any of the partner hospitals?

We don't go to the hospitals themselves; that doesn't really feel right to us. We like to follow the Santa model: mysteriously deliver huge piles of toys, up the chimney, and out.

When you started the charity, you were not yet a father. Now that you have a child of your own, has your perspective changed at all?

Absolutely, because I've met fathers whose children needed our help. Meeting the other dads is often heartbreaking. My own son is very young still. If anything ever happened to him, I hope I could be as strong as they are.

Gamers Give Back
Child's Play
www.childsplaycharity.org

Aside from donations, what can everyone out there do to help the cause? What kind of outside support has the charity received in the past?

What we've seen over the years is that people have taken a lot of ownership in Child's Play, and you can check out the results of that on the Events page. They're hosting their own events—gaming marathons, parties, anything you can think of. The guys from LoadingReadyRun.com played that awful *Desert Bus* game for something like a million hours, raising more than $22,000 in the process. We had nothing to do with it.

In addition to Child's Play, Mike and you also run the Penny Arcade Expo, help produce the *Penny Arcade Adventures* games, and maintain the comic strip and blog that started it all. What inspires you to push forward with all these projects, and what comes next?

The games will be done after the next two episodes release on PS3, so maybe that will be the new model: doing less projects. I was very happy just writing about games and making comics with Gabe, so we don't take on something new unless it's something we really want to do. There's nothing new on the table now, but once Child's Play wraps up this year we'll see if there's anything we're especially interested in.

Because of this extensive involvement with the gaming community, you and Mike have, in a way, become unofficial representatives of the common gamer. Do you think that your popularity grants you a certain degree of power, and if so, how do feel about this role?

Gabe and I have very specific tastes in games, and we try to be up front about that so that people can know if our opinion on something is useful to them. That is my primary goal, to be useful. Anything beyond that is secondary, but if our status as "representatives" allows us to act as a focus for generosity, then maybe it's all right.

We also asked Jerry for his thoughts on the modern games media: "Villains! Present company excluded, of course."

Jerry Holkins 411

AGE: 32
PROFESSIONAL ROLE AT PENNY ARCADE: Writer
GAMES THAT GOT YOU INTO GAMING: *UFO, Odyssey2*
FIRST JOB: Dishwasher
FAVORITE COMIC STRIP: Calvin & Hobbes
FAVORITE WORD: Obstreperous
PERSONAL HERO: Samuel Clemens
CURRENTLY PLAYING: *World of Goo, Killzone 2* beta

SF
PLAYS
PSP

EVERYWHERE JUST GOT BETTER

You can hail a cab or you can catch a trolley, but there's really only one way to get from the Embarcadero to the Sunset and anywhere in between. And that's with a brand-new PSP®-3000 system in your hand. Designed around the biggest and brightest widescreen display you can fit in your pocket, there's simply no other mobile device that even comes close. Which makes it perfect for playing the best games and biggest movies. There aren't many ways to improve San Francisco. But a PSP system makes anywhere better.

PlayStation Portable

PLAYSTATION Network

SONY
SELECT
START
VOL

Crisis Core - Final Fantasy VII -

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SONY
myspace mobile
Top Friends
Page 1 of 3
Jimmy
Mood: full
Status: Jimmy is playing games

Incredible-Megatronic
Teddy the Jaybird Mix
MP3
00:42 / 05:25
SELECT
START

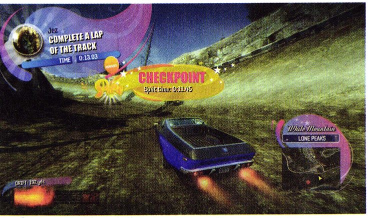
PRODUCTS RANGE FROM EVERYONE 10+ TO TEENᵀᴹ

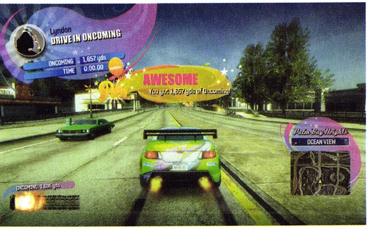
E10+ T

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PlayStation Digest

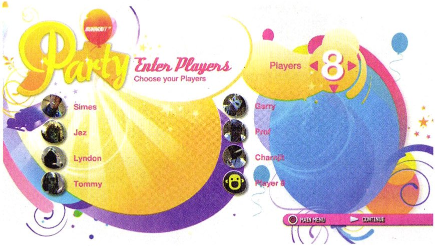
Top Stories, Industry Bits, and Oddities


Jez
COMPLETE A LAP OF THE TRACK
TIME 0:13.03
CHECKPOINT
Split time: 0:11.45
White Mountain
LONE PEAKS
DRIFT: 192 yds


Lyndon
DRIVE IN ONCOMING
ONCOMING 1,657 yds
TIME 0:00.00
AWESOME
You got 1,657 yds of Oncoming!
Palm Bay Heights
OCEAN VIEW
ONCOMING: 1,696 yds

Paradise in a box

Fans of the arcadey crash-'em-up might be getting a tad burnt out (ho ho) by now, but those of you who have either held off or have no access to the Internet will see your patience rewarded this February with the release of *Burnout Paradise: The Ultimate Box.* Along with the full game, this special edition includes every single piece of downloadable content ever released. That means every car, bike, hovercraft, whatever, is right inside the box. Also inside: a new offline multiplayer mode titled "Paradise Party." Pass the pad around in eight rounds with up to eight players, competing in quickfire stunt, speed, and skill challenges. Of course, if you do manage to finally connect to the Internet, you can keep track of your newfound friends with the Burnout Paradise Network, another new edition to the box.

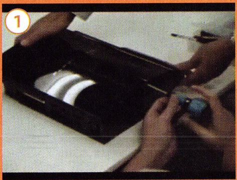

BURNOUT
Party
Enter Players
Choose your Players
Players 8
Simes
Jez
Lyndon
Tommy
Garry
Prof
Charnjit
Player 8
MAIN MENU
CONTINUE

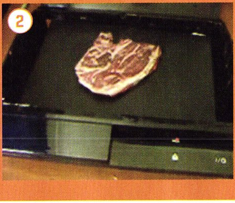
Best PS3 videos on YouTube (Jan. '09 Edition)

Want to know what's inside your PS3? This four-part video dissects the system with the utmost care, piece by delicate piece. Unfortunately, the explanations are in Japanese. But still, an intriguing process nonetheless! Check out **techonstaff's** video at **http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHS07EFGZ3g**

Think the PS3 is only used for games, Blu-rays, and other media? Wrong. You can also use your PS3 to...cook a steak. Okay, so the insides of the system were probably removed and replaced with an actual grill. Witness **idcanyname's** culinary skills at **http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mXI-MqQbXG8**

Don't just listen to music...experience it fully! One adventurous PS3 owner explains in great detail how you can manipulate the PS3's visual player when listening to songs. **punisher18** reveals all the details about the hidden feature at **http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICHhn1-NH14**

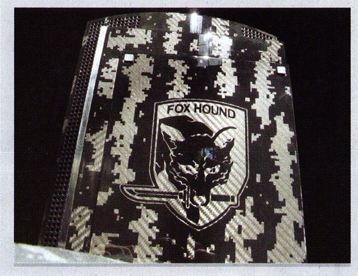




METAL GEAR SOLID 4
GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

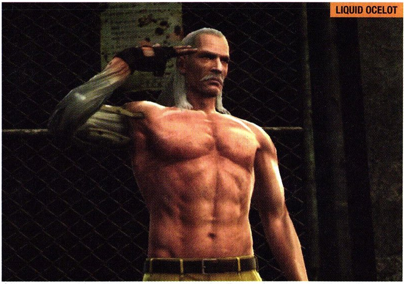
We'd Totally Hit This

Stunning, gorgeous, and way out of our league. Signed by Hideo Kojima and Yumi Kikuchi, this baby was posted on eBay with a starting price of $299.99, but escalated, within a week, to a closing bid of $17,100, with 15-percent of the proceeds going to charity. We're jealous of the lucky, rich bastard who won the auction. He (or she?) must be swaggering around town with one hell of a smug smirk!



More Metal Gear

MGO's new downloadable expansion pack, titled Meme, offers two new playable characters (Mei Ling and Liquid Ocelot = awesome!), three new maps, and a handful of new multiplayer rules, such as "stealth deathmatch," which turns on stealth automatically throughout the battle. Finally, a chance to use Mei Ling's alluring charm in the battlefield (enemies will be stunned momentarily, giving her the upper hand).

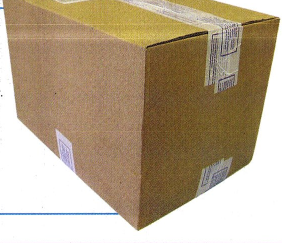


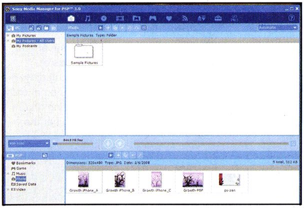
MEI LING
PRARIE DOG
TDM
50 62 05 50
LEVEL 1
PRARIE DOG
REMOTE CAPTAIN
MISSOURI

Snake's Box, True Story

When playing a *Metal Gear* game, it's easy to be skeptical about some of Snake's techniques. Moving unseen through a hostile facility in a cardboard box, for example? Unlikely. Or is it?

A man in Germany managed to break out of prison…in a cardboard box. He was making stationary at his prison job, and then, after his shift, he sealed himself into a cardboard box and was carried out the prison with the rest of the packages. After the truck passed the prison gates, he cut a hole in the box and leapt into freedom. Sounds exactly like something Snake would do! Except…this man was a convicted drug dealer, and Snake is a hero. Our hero, to be specific.




Sony Media Manager for PSP™ 3.0
PC
Photo
My Pictures
My Pictures - All Users
My Podcasts
Sample Pictures
844.0 MB free
PSP
Bookmarks
Game
Music
Photo
Saved Data
Video
Growth iPhone_A
Growth iPhone_B
Growth iPhone_C
Growth-PSP
ps-zen

Sample Pictures Type: Folder

Dimensions: 320x480 Type: JPG Date: 2/6/2008

5 total, 312 KB

WANNA GET ORGANIZED?

Download a free media manager for your PSP (http://www.us.playstation.com/PSN/mediamanager/). With it, you can back-up games, saved-game files, and video content you've purchased from the PlayStation store as well as easily transfer photos and videos back and forth between your PC and PSP. The best part is that it lets you rip CDs straight from your PC's hard drive to your PSP. The down side? It only supports PC (sorry Mac users) and has an unnecessarily long-winded and cluttered installation process. But once you get it running, transferring data becomes a seamless, painless, drag-and-drop process.

Coming Soon?

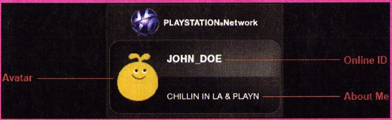
Infinity Ward *(Call of Duty 4)* is allegedly working on "a new sci-fi title" but won't be releasing any details until E3, at the earliest. A science fiction *Call of Duty,* maybe? Or a videogame adaptation of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* by Philip K. Dick (in other words, *Blade Runner)?* Send your guesses in!

TimeSplitters 4

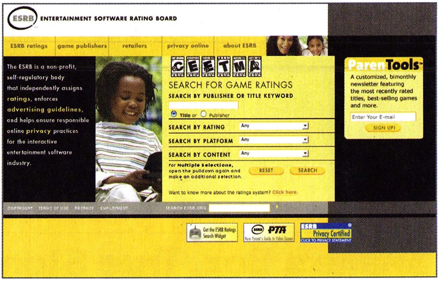
Also, Free Radical Design (the makers of *Haze)* is toiling away on *TimeSplitters 4,* so we hear. They won't be using the *Haze* engine, according to the rumors circulating the Interwebisphere, but beyond that, they too are remaining mum until sometime later in 2009.

The Test:
Are You Truly a Fanboy?

There are PlayStation fans, and there are PlayStation *Fans.* If you consider yourself amongst the latter, you'll want to proudly display your PlayStation identity wherever you are—forums, online networking sites, wherever. To get such a tag, sign up for the PlayStation Underground **(http://www.us.playstation.com),** then link your PSN ID to it. For now, the portable ID tag only displays your PSN ID, your PSN avatar, and a short message, but there's so much room for expansion. Personally, we're hoping for functionality for Trophies, background designs, and singing, dancing, customizable avatars!


PLAYSTATION Network
JOHN_DOE
Online ID
Avatar
CHILLIN IN LA & PLAYN
About Me

Teen, Mature, or Adults Only?


ESRB ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE RATING BOARD
ESRB ratings
game publishers
retailers
privacy online
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C E E T M A
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SEARCH BY PUBLISHER OR TITLE KEYWORD
SEARCH BY RATING
SEARCH BY PLATFORM
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● Title or ○ Publisher

SEARCH BY RATING Any

SEARCH BY PLATFORM Any

SEARCH BY CONTENT Any

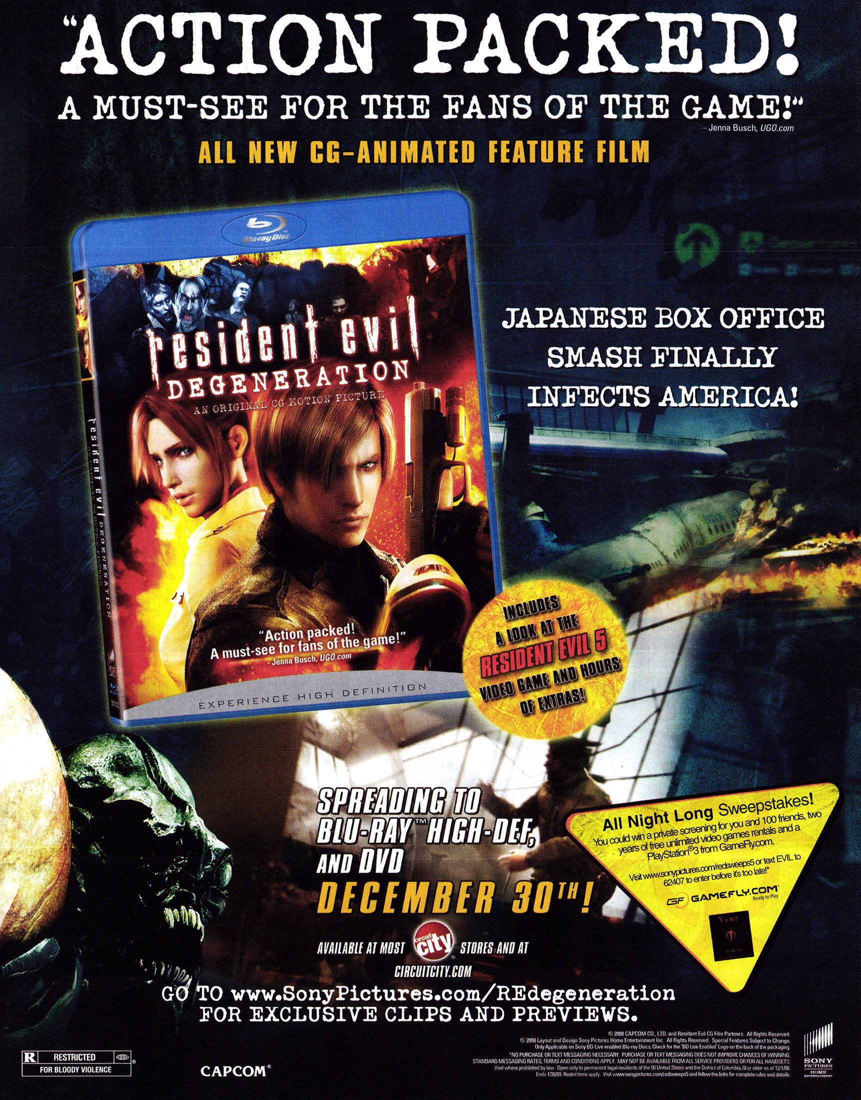
For Multiple Selections, open the pulldown again and make an additional selection.

Want to know more about the ratings system? Click here.

A customized, bimonthly newsletter featuring the most recently rated titles, best-selling games and more.

Enter Your E-mail

Videogames, violence, and the effect both have on the youth of America: A debate that elicits heated words from some and indifferent eye rolls from others. Whatever your stance, the Entertainment Software Rating Board's (ESRB) new rating summaries can be seen as a win-win for everyone. Now, concerned parents can learn details about exactly why a game earned its Teen or Mature rating (and make decisions accordingly) and cynical gamers can just go on shrugging off the issue, with slightly less worry that their beloved pastime will be censored by others who just "don't get it." Lawmakers like Senators Hillary Clinton and Joseph Lieberman have already shown support for the new rating summaries. Like we said, it's a win-win.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AN ORIGINAL CG MOTION PICTURE
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- Jenna Busch, UGO.com
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Special Features Subject to Change. Only Applicable on Sony BD-Live enabled Blu-ray Discs. Check for the "BD Live Enabled" Logo on the back of the packaging.

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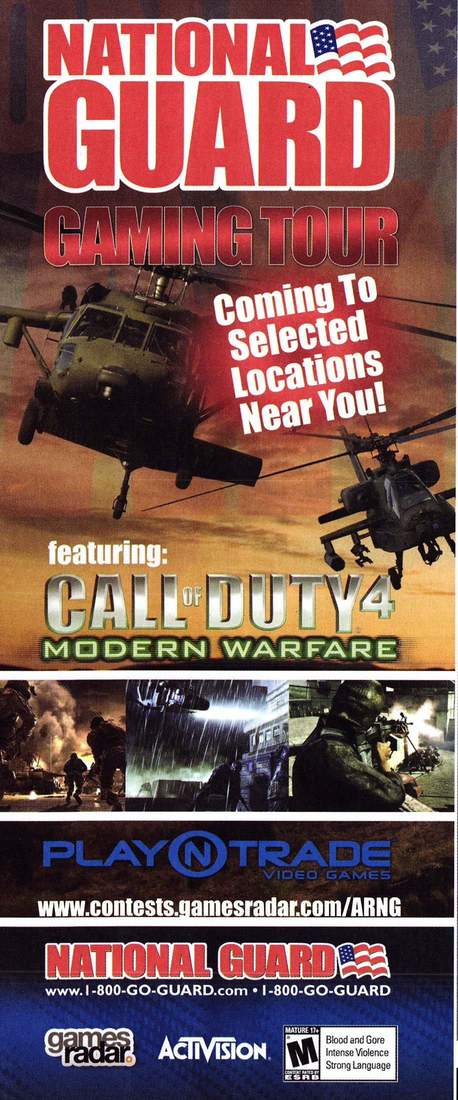
SONY PICTURES HOME ENTERTAINMENT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ACTIVISION
MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language

TOP10LIST

What we're playing, watching, reading, and consuming this month. Only top-shelf geek paraphernalia need apply.

Fallout 3 Official Game Guide | Book | $35

Weighing in at 496 pages, plus a giant map insert, if this strategy guide doesn't answer every question you could possibly have for surviving the Wasteland, well, nothing probably will. As Rob hits the road *again,* he's reading off exact flowcharts of all the Karmic choices. It makes the rest of us sleepy, but it sure is purdy.

Metallica Death Magnetic | Music | $9.99

Ken missed a few Metallica albums since *Enter Sandman.* But he's back in the bloody saddle again, baby! (Yuk, that sounds gross.) Unfortunately, his iTunes erased it off his iPod before he could back it up. Curse you, hi-technology! Of course, Apple and Metallica are laughing all the way to the bank as Ken sends another $9.99 off to iTunes.

Wrath of the Lich King | MMORPG | $39.99

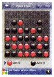
"Stop calling me a nerd, guys," Teresa snaps. "Stop saying I smell like a nerd. Stop saying I wear nerd clothes. *World of Warcraft* is, like, the number one game in the world right now. If you doubt me, you *will* feel the wrath of the Lich King! And I'm not addicted. Stop calling me an addi… Oh crap, gotta run! I have a raid."

The Big Lebowski | Movie | $35

Dude, it's a bowling ball! The cult classic is now 10 years old, and this anniversary release includes two discs packaged in…a small, plastic bowling ball! Rob rates the movie as classic Coen Brothers magic. The new extras—some featurettes—are okay, but it's really the same version released previously, with added bowling ball. Yeah, that's the gimmick. Plastic bowling ball. Movie's incredible, though.

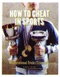
Cheratussin AC | Medicine | $10 copay

Why is Gary so mellow this month? Perhaps it's his scrip for Cheratussin AC, a delightful medical cocktail of guaifenesin and codeine. Like PB&J, these are two great sensations that not only taste great together, but help with a cough and improve a mood like nothing else.



Four Free | Game | Free

This is the free iPod Touch version of the classic offline game Connect Four. Ken plays it for hours in the dark while he's holding his toddler, Sebastian, when he runs out of episodes of Mad Men and Lost and there are no soccer games to follow. Sebastian prefers Four Free to Daddy's other passion because his slumber isn't interrupted by a loud, "Gooooaaaallllllll!"



How To Cheat In Sports | Book | $15

From corking bats and throwing spitballs in baseball to tricking out legal parts in NASCAR, cheating is prevalent everywhere. *San Francisco Chronicle* writer Scott Ostler's collection of anecdotes, explanations, and advice reveals how to get that edge you're looking for. Written in Ostler's terrific pithy style, it's a quick, easy read filled with great stories. Great, Rob. Now we know you're cheating. At everything.

A40 Audio System | Headset and mixamp | $249.95

It's a bit pricey and the setup's a bit complex (you'll need a $10 USB adapter to use it on your PS3), but according to Scott, the A40 is totally worth it. It channels both game audio and voice chat into the same headset (and lets you adjust the volume balance), allows you to mix in music directly from your MP3 player, and offers incredibly realistic spatial audio. Check out astrogaming.com for more!

LaunderLand | Laundromat | Lots and lots of quarters

Scott would simply like to take this opportunity to thank his local laundromat for having a working *Capcom vs. SNK 2* arcade cabinet. They may not have updated their sign since the 1970s, but they sure know how to treat their customers.

Quantum of Solace | Movie | $10

Cheapskate that he is, Roger took his wife to a free movie screening of *Quantum of Solace* for their wedding anniversary celebration. The movie? Daniel Craig is a stellar Bond, but Roger did lament the lack of the usual gadgets. And his date? Mrs. Burchill went home after the flick and caught *Casino Royale* via InDemand, while Roger had to go upstairs to do some PTOM work. Ahhhh…romance.

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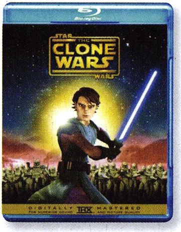
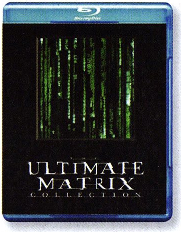
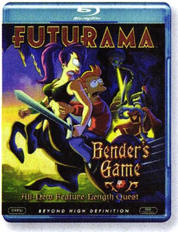
Blu-ray Central

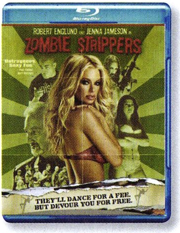
You Blu it last year. Do it again this year

Bond...lots of Bond, a *Star Wars* Clone, multiple *Matri,* top shelf animation comedies, Japanese cowboys, fly sci-fi, and yes, sweet zombie strippers. What a way to start the new year.








Robert Englund and Jenna Jameson in
Zombie Strippers
They'll dance for a fee. But devour you for free.

Star Wars: The Clone Wars

PRICE: $35.99 **RATED:** PG

| MOVIE | It might be going out on a limb, but despite the critical derision, *The Clone Wars* and the TV series that it started could very well be the best thing to happen to the floundering *Star Wars* saga since *Return of the Jedi.* Paving the way for the myriad of stories between episodes 2 and 3, this is a fun, family-friendly action movie. The CG for the space sequences look incredible—indistinguishable from the live action movies. So much so, that the fake-looking characters are jarring to watch. The writing is better than your average cartoon, but only marginally. Then again, bad writing is par for the course with *Star Wars,* so just turn your brain off and enjoy the show.

| EXTRAS | The most interesting extra is time-sensitive. The thoroughly in-depth preview of the new CG TV show is enough to get sci-fi lovers excited. But, there are many extras included—character profiles, deleted scenes, and tons of making-of shorts.

MOVIE ★★★
EXTRAS ★★★

The Matrix Ultimate Collection

PRICE: $129.95 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | You can't just buy the original *Matrix* on Blu-ray. Sorry. Thankfully, the Blu-ray release of *The Ultimate Matrix Trilogy* is great. The Animatrix is in HD now (unlike the HD-DVD release), and for fans of the series, these movies are still incredible masterpieces of audio-visual fluff. The first movie is undeniably a cinematic legend. Despite the stupid over-arching plot, the second and third movies have some of the most amazing action sequences ever created, making them perfect vehicles to shame your non-HD/home theater-owning friends and family members.

| EXTRAS | Where to begin… All the extras from the previous releases are here, comprising literally hours of material. Still no directors' commentary, but the movie critic commentary tracks are often fascinating and brutally fun. The philosophers' tracks, on the other hand, are pretentious and laughable. Really, people, these aren't deep movies… Either way, the sheer volume of extras is stunning.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★★

Futurama: Bender's Game

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** PG-13

| MOVIE | Fans of *Futurama* must have been overjoyed at the prospect of feature length movies coming out, but while the first two were enjoyable, they weren't feature-length phenomenal like *The Simpsons Movie.* Happily, *Bender's Game* almost reaches those heights. This is easily the best of the bunch, with plenty of punches thrown at roleplaying nerds and the like. It's fast, fun, and looks spectacular in hi-def, with amazing colors and pristine sharpness.

| EXTRAS | The cast, crew, and creator commentary is fun, and can be either audio-only, or picture-in-picture. The problem is that it's too focused on them joking around, so surprisingly little of it is directly related to the scene at hand. The rest of the extras are certainly amusing. Aside from deleted scenes and outtakes, there are humorous shorts on the topics in the movie, animation, a look at the next *Futurama* feature, and other throwaway goodies.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★

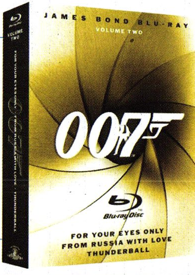
Zombie Strippers

PRICE: $38.96 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | B-movie lovers, much like most niche fans (anime people, we're looking at you) have become accustomed to settling for glimpses of brilliance amidst a sea of crap. Yet, the B-movie can be great if done right. And thankfully, there's someone out there to combat the Uwe Bolls and Paul W.S. Andersons of the world. Jay Lee wrote and directed a labor of gaudy love with *Zombie Strippers.* Jenna Jameson plays a stripper who finds extreme popularity after being turned into a zombie, alongside Robert Englund as a hilariously smarmy club owner who cashes in. Mixing plenty of nudity, violence, and gore with philosophy, smart nods to the genre, and lowbrow humor, it's clear that Lee gets the genre and respects his viewers. The movie is hilarious and a new high mark for low-grade movie making.

| EXTRAS | Yes, Jenna does commentary… with Englund and Lee. Yes, it's great. Even if it didn't have a bevy of deleted scenes, behind the scene and making of videos, and other usual stuff, the commentary alone would make the extras portion worthwhile.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★



PlayStation: The Official Magazine
PICK OF THE MONTH

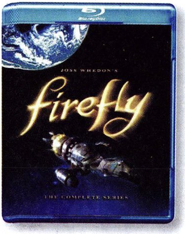
James Bond Blu-ray Collection

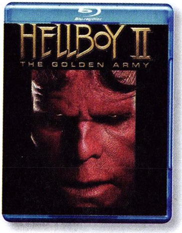
PRICE: $179.96 **RATED:** PG/PG-13

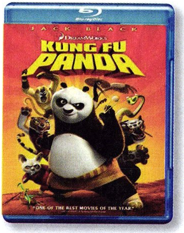
| MOVIE | MGM beat the hell out of the Bond series on DVD, re-releasing boxed sets nearly ad nauseam. On Blu-ray, however, they've made a promising start with six mostly classic Bonds. The remastered video and sound are especially exhilarating on the three Connery Bonds—*Dr. No, From Russia with Love,* and *Thunderball*—and these are easily the highlights of the collections. The sound is finally mixed for HD digital surround, and the vivid colors and sharp cinematography are stunning on Blu-ray. Brosnan's *Die Another Day* is good, but *GoldenEye* would have been a better choice. Roger Moore's *Live and Let Die* and *For Your Eyes Only* are the cream of the crop for his era.

| EXTRAS | Taken as a whole, this set offers a veritable college course in 007. The Connery-era extras are especially interesting for film buffs. Old promotional videos and making-of documentaries are terrific. Commentary tracks are like audio documentaries, with a horde of new and old interviews of the director, cast, and crew. Each film has an impressive array of extras, most of which are worth checking out.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★★







Blu-ray Disc
SUKIYAKI WESTERN DJANGO

Firefly: The Complete Series

PRICE: $89.98 RATED: PG-13

| MOVIE | A slim tome of happiness, there's not much to say about *Firefly* that hasn't already been repeated on the Internet a hundred times. If you've been a fan, you'll likely pick this up, because the show deserves to be seen in HD. If you haven't seen it, well… *Firefly* is easily some of the best science fiction to ever hit TV, before Fox unceremoniously killed it. Also, it's a lot easier to take than *Serenity,* the oppressive, yet still amazing feature film it spawned. The picture quality isn't amazing though, with noticeable grain in both dark and light shots.

| EXTRAS | The set includes the standard definition extras originally included with the DVD, along with a newer lunchtime chat between Whedon and most of the male members of the cast. It's a nerd fest to be sure, but fans will eat it up.

MOVIE ★★★★★
EXTRAS ★★½

Hellboy II: The Golden Army

PRICE: $39.98 RATED: PG-13

| MOVIE | Guillermo Del Toro is one of the best directors of our generation, and *Hellboy II* is further proof. Essentially multiplying the enthralling fantasy elements from *Pan's Labyrinth, The Golden Army* is an amazing action movie full of gorgeous and grotesque imagery, humor, and action. The first *Hellboy* was great, but the sequel trumps it in every way.

| EXTRAS | Del Toro provides great commentary and extras, but *Hellboy II* is impressive even by his standards. An excellent documentary covering every aspect of the film weighs in at almost three hours. Beyond that, there are a horde of other goodies, like still galleries, the director's notebook, and deleted scenes. The only thing this disc lacks is a director's cut of the movie.

MOVIE ★★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★★

Kung Fu Panda

PRICE: $39.99 RATED: PG

| MOVIE | So, yeah… *Kung Fu Panda* is awesome. It's surprising, but the movie works in all the right ways. The jokes are great, the voice acting spot on, and the fight scenes are terrific. There's enough scary drama and action to keep it away from the very young, but beyond that, this is a great homage to classic kung fu movies, and a great animated adventure as well.

| EXTRAS | The extras are squarely aimed at twitchy kids with short attention spans. There are really lame DVD games, shallow making-of bits galore, and a PIP commentary/behind-the-scenes feature that shows how the scenes were made. Some of the sequences shown are great, and it's clear a lot of time went into it, but there are a few too many instances of the camera just closing in on the creators' face to show his emotional reaction (or something), instead of giving interested viewers some real meat.

MOVIE ★★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★

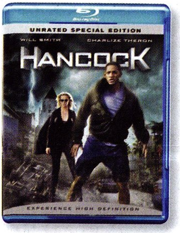
Sukiyaki Western Django

PRICE: $34.98 RATED: R

| MOVIE | Here's one strictly for fans of bizarre Japanese cinema. From the director of *Audition* and *Ichi the Killer* comes a Japanese remake of an Italian spaghetti western *(Django),* which was itself a rip-off of another Italian spaghetti western, *A Fistful of Dollars,* which, in turn, was a direct remake of Akira Kurosawa's *Yojimbo.* And oh, this one is in English and set in Nevada, despite an all-Japanese cast (save for Quentin Tarantino). It's goofy nonsense, and entirely focused on style over substance, yet not without charm.

| EXTRAS | Not much here. Deleted scenes, a making-of video, and support for BD-Live at some point.

MOVIE ★★★½
EXTRAS ★★



Hancock

PRICE: $39.95 RATED: PG-13/UNRATED

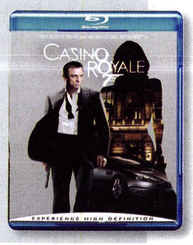
| MOVIE | Maligned at theaters this summer, *Hancock* is actually the most original and interesting superhero movie in a long time. A bittersweet, tragic-comic take on characters like Superman, Will Smith's lonely and bitter hero is both likeable and pitiable. Many people derided the surprise ending, but the twist has a Marvel precedent (just read the Eternals), and adds a level of drama not seen in most superhero movies. The 10 extra minutes add subtle touches in the unrated version, like a noteworthy, humorous, and yet sad look at Hancock's attempt to get laid.

| EXTRAS | The seven included featurettes are generally okay, and some are quite good. Unfortunately, the biggest extra is a disappointing "on-set visual diary." It's just a standard picture-in-picture montage giving a behind-the-scenes look at the production while the movie is playing, presumably in place of real commentary. Unfortunately, there's virtually no substance here, and it especially lacks details on the differences between the two cuts and insight into the story. Good commentary would have been far more interesting.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★½

Jason D'Aprile's Rant of the Month

You'll notice that in all the Bond talk, I omit reference to the re-release of *Casino Royale.* A great movie to be sure, but fans of Blu-ray should view the second HD release of the film with suspicion. One of the worst aspects of DVD was the constant and pointless re-release of titles with new packaging—maybe some new extras—and little else. Hell, MGM released the older Bonds so many times it was hard to keep count. In this case, do the addition of commentary and a second disc of extras make anyone want to buy the movie all over again? My hope is that the answer is a resounding "No!" DVD collectors sadly got used to accepting that all their favorite movies would be released in a better package shortly after they bought the disc *(Sin City),* but do HD fans really have to put up with this all over again? *Casino Royale* still looks and sounds great, but there's no extended cut, so unless you must have extras to mull over or didn't buy it yet, give this one a pass. Maybe next time, Sony Pictures and the rest will release a movie with proper extras on its first go-around.



Questions? Comments? Let us know! Email **Jason** at: **PTOM_bluray@futureus.com**

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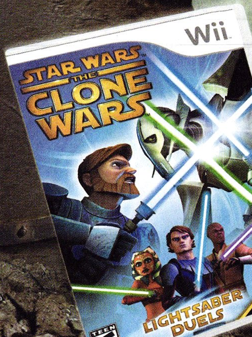
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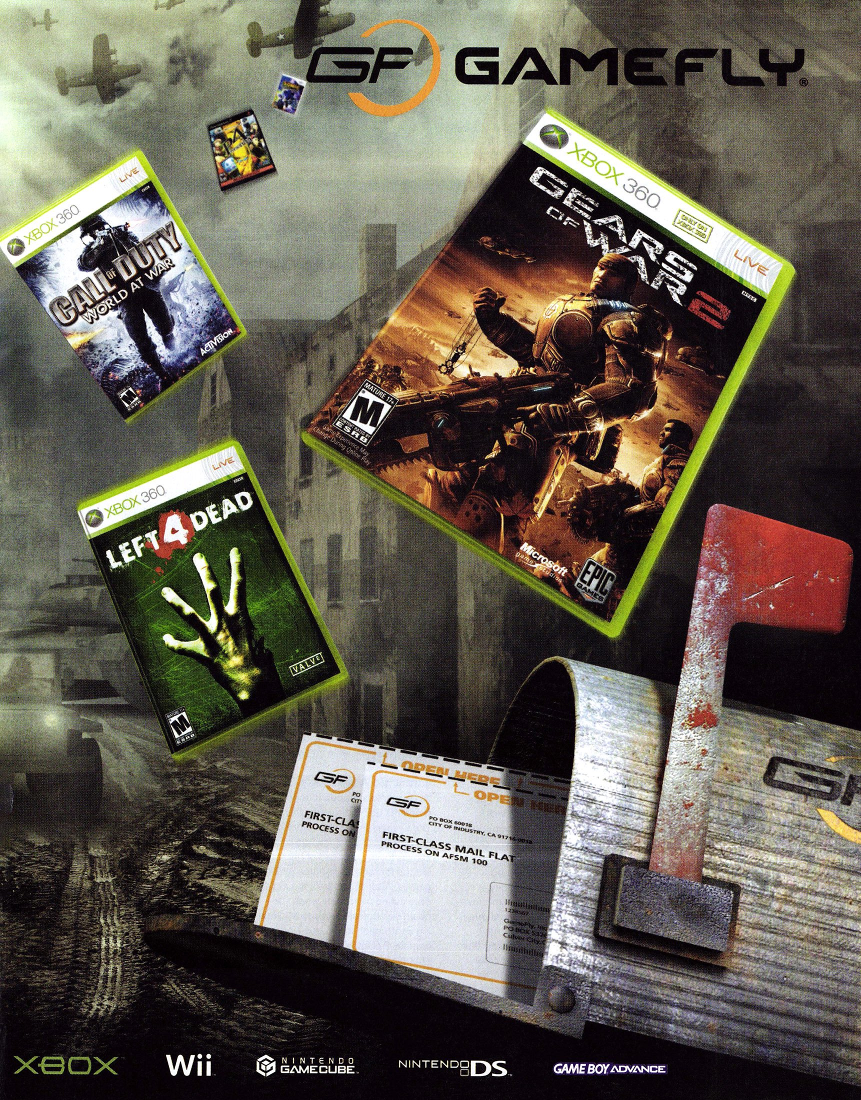
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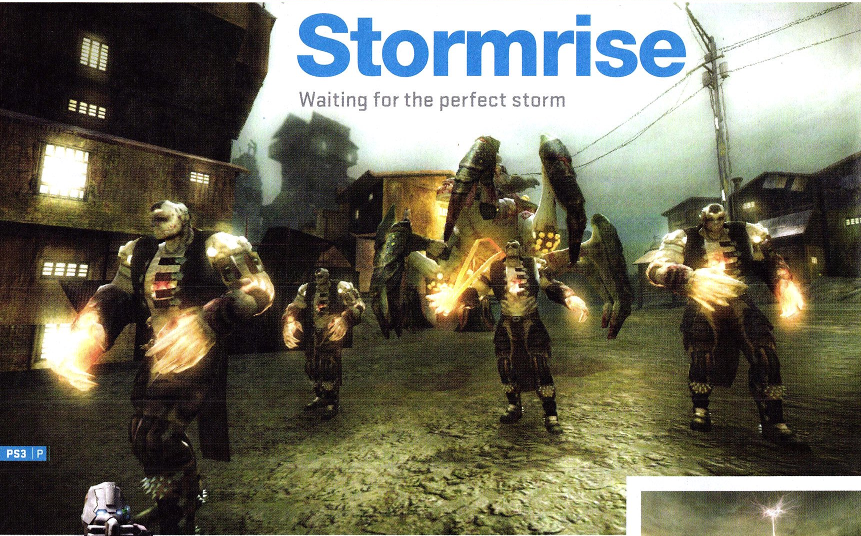


Stormrise

Waiting for the perfect storm

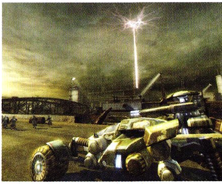
PS3 | P

PS3 GENRE: Real-time Strategy AVAILABLE: 2009 PUBLISHER: Sega DEVELOPER: The Creative Assembly

There's a storm brewing. You'd think after what happened to the Earth, we'd have learned. But it's the same old story. The Echelon and their tech; they managed to make it through by hiding away—self-induced hibernation. And the Sai; they endured, they adapted—somehow grew their tribe. They're the same really, both survivors. Both have the strength to start rebuilding this world, but they don't see it, they never see it. All they see are the differences, the possible threat... there's no turning back now. It's going to happen again and it's going to be bad. Be ready.

Strategic Advantage

While mankind appears doomed to repeat its war-mongering ways in The Creative Assembly's forthcoming *Stormrise;* what may be a path of sorrow for the vestiges of humanity is a boon for fans of real-time strategy games. After all, where's the fun in co-existing peacefully when you could be amassing armies and raining destruction down upon despised enemies? Sure, you'll be fighting amidst the bleak and barren remnants of Earth's prior "civilizations," but conquering enemies and blowing up stuff (even if it is already rubble) is always fun. It's something RTS fans understand well, and the reason why gamers probably aren't suited to careers as peace envoys.



The game features one universal resource, which is harvested from a series of upgradeable Node points throughout the maps.

Legions of PC gamers who can extol the virtues of RTSs ad infinitum; but despite some satisfying ports, it's a genre that hasn't reached its full potential on consoles. The roadblocks to transferring the unique gameplay attributes of the genre to console gamepads have always seemed obvious: control, control, control…while maintaining the compelling multiplayer facet inherent to the genre on PC. But while the barriers are evident, attempts to arrive at a satisfying solution have been infrequent with the focus on minimizing the degradation of the PC-like experience rather than innovating and developing the console one. The Creative Assembly is intent upon changing that status quo.

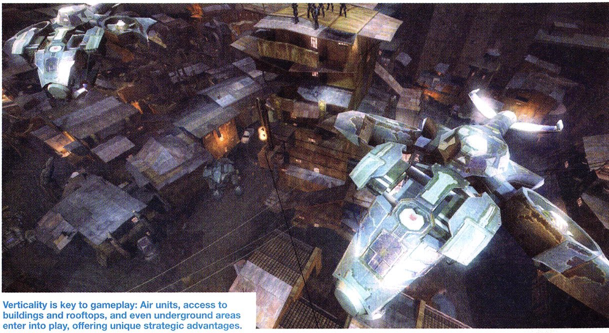
The Creative Assembly's only PS3 game to date is the action/strategy hybrid *Viking: Battle for Asgard*—an innovative effort, but an uneven result.

Taking Control

From the beginning, CA was determined to avoid the temptation of simply porting or adapting PC-style controls for *Stormrise.* The only workable option in their mind was to build a fresh control system that optimized the positives of the console controller rather than highlighting the fact that it wasn't a keyboard and mouse. The result? The Whip Select system.

According to Vispi Bhopti, CA's Communications Manager on *Stormrise,* Whip Select is employed entirely via the right analog control stick with all units on the playfield (in any location; directly visible or not) represented by a corresponding unit icon. "As the player holds the right control stick out, in any direction, a light beam effect is emitted in that direction. As you roll the control stick in any direction, the light beam highlights specific unit icons. When you have selected an icon you want to move to, all you do is let go of the stick and the screen whips across to that precise unit," says Bhopti.

"Players can also use the same stick and flick it in a general direction to perform a Quick Whip to the nearest unit in that area." Bhopti admits that the process sounds a bit complex, "But I swear it is absurdly easy and extraordinarily accurate in-game!"



Verticality is key to gameplay: Air units, access to buildings and rooftops, and even underground areas enter into play, offering unique strategic advantages.

Multiplayer Maneuvers

The PlayStation 3's online capabilities mean that the RTS-specific multiplayer experience is no longer exclusive to the PC platform, as it once was with previous generation consoles. But merely mimicking the traditional RTS multiplayer experience isn't enough for a potentially genre-redefining game like *Stormrise.* Bhopti confirms that multiplayer is a major focus for the development team, but isn't divulging much more information currently.

"We are still in the process of locking away our final options for our multiplayer offering, so I can't go into too much detail yet," stonewalls Bhopti. Meanwhile, he tantalizingly reveals in the same breath, "But one thing that we are quite proud of is incorporating 'join anytime' functionality. Considering the massive scale of multiplayer battles we are looking to generate, this will be a very useful feature for players."

Storm Front

Given the near-monopoly of attention that action games and shooters receive in the console world, it's rare that a strategy game shows up on our anticipation radar. *Stormrise* is the exception because it appears poised to break all the rules. Its elaborate multi-tiered 3D environments, inventive new control system, and overarching focus on innovation promises an experience that looks and feels like a first-person shooter, but still offers the intellectual depth and challenge of a strategy game. Yes, the storm is coming, and I *will* be ready.

Roger Burchill

We need Bigger Guns

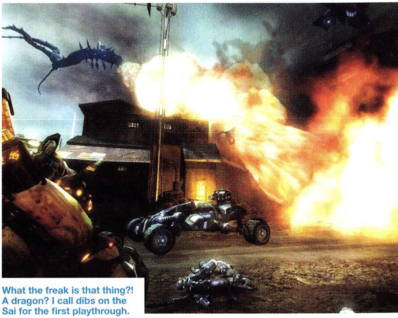
Vispi Bhopti of The Creative Assembly reveals his favorite unit type in *Stormrise:*

The Brood Queen: She's a massive spider/crab-like beast unit. The largest of the land units for the Sai. We're currently designing some special abilities for her. Ideas being thrown around include spitting a huge barrage of acid rain across a field, and even the ability to spawn small baby crabs that scurry off and attack at will. Awfully creepy; damn nasty; very cool!

Strategy is their Game

Founded in 1987, The Creative Assembly began its storied existence by producing PC game conversions before becoming a developer of sports games for EA in the '90s including *FIFA, Rugby World Cup, Australian Rules Football*, and *Cricket World Cup*. Its first foray into strategy games came in 2000 with the acclaimed *Shogun: Total War,* which established the developer as a genre mainstay, and the rest, as they say, is history:

- *Shogun: Total War* (PC; 2000)
- *Medieval: Total War* (PC; 2002)
- *Rome: Total War* (PC; 2004)
- *Spartan: Total War* (PS2, Xbox, GameCube; 2005)
- *Medieval II: Total War* (PC; 2006)
- *Empire: Total War* (PC; 2009)



What the freak is that thing?! A dragon? I call dibs on the Sai for the first playthrough.

PlayStation Gallery

Updates, sneak peeks, works-in-progress

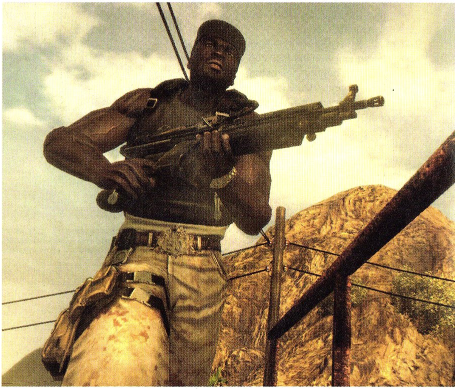
50 Cent: Blood on the Sand

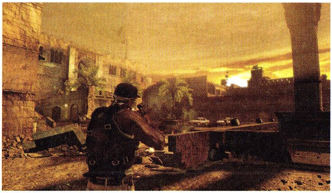
Hands-On

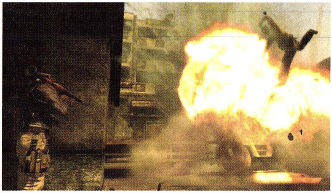
PS3 AVAILABLE: January 2009 GENRE: Third-person Shooter
PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: Swordfish Studios

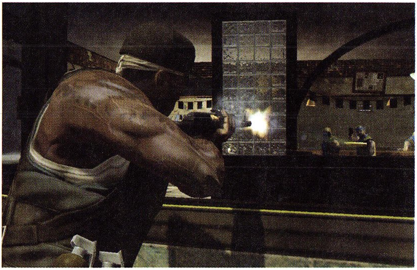
Here's a fun fact: the original 50 Cent game, *Bulletproof,* sold 2.4 million copies. Seriously. No surprise, then, that a sequel's in the works, but it is surprising that—contrary to the abysmal critical reception of the first game—*Blood on the Sand* actually looks, well, really fun…in an absurdly over-the-top action movie sort of way. The story features Fifty and a friend (perfect for drop-in/drop-out co-op) pumping bullets into crime lords in a generic yet clearly Middle Eastern country in pursuit of—wait for it—a diamond-encrusted skull. Combine this premise with an incredibly arcadey point-based combat system that rewards everything from chaining kills to shooting barrels and you've got a game that falls somewhere between *Army of Two* and *The Club.* And while it's not all run-and-gun thanks to a simple yet intuitive cover system, action is as close to "non-stop" as you've probably ever seen in a game.

Throw in 18 exclusive tracks from the man himself, some appropriately Mature dialogue, and regenerating health to keep the action going, and suddenly this game's got guilty pleasure written all over it. Scott







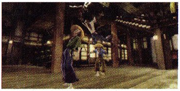


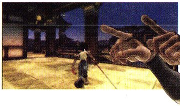
Afro Samurai

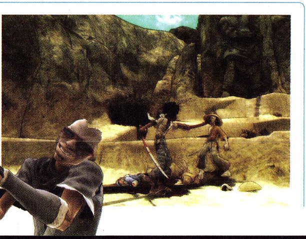
Hands-On

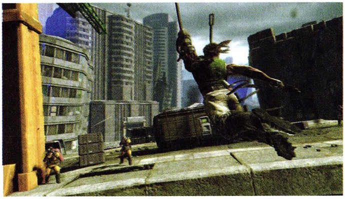
PS3 AVAILABLE: January 2009 GENRE: Action
PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai DEVELOPER: Namco Bandai

When it comes to names, *Afro Samurai* delivers on its promise. It stars a samurai. Who has an afro. Beyond that, the game has also been promising "elegant violence," and this stylish beat-'em-up adventure seems set to deliver on that as well. With your basic array of kicks, light attacks, and heavy attacks, Afro can pull off combo-heavy combat in which you gore and dismember your anime-inspired foes in all kinds of visually thrilling manners. The hip-hop soundtrack (courtesy of Wu-Tang's RZA) helps sets the tone for this anachronistic tale, starring a lone warrior on a journey to become the top warrior while seeking revenge for the brutal death of his father Gary





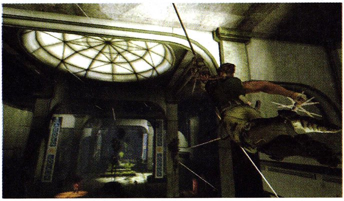


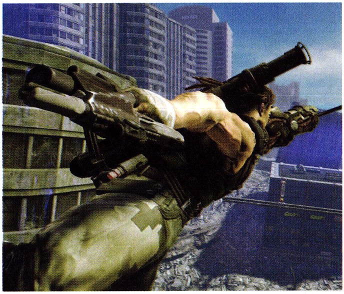


Bionic Commando Hands-On

PS3 AVAILABLE: Winter GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Capcom DEVELOPER: GRIN

Watching someone play *Bionic Commando* can be an exhilarating experience. Seeing the iconic super soldier spring into action, swinging through a rubble-strewn city recently demolished by a terrorist attack, pulling off slick moves like zip kicks (grapple an enemy and jump in for a powerful blow) or skeet shots (toss a baddie into the air with your bionic arm, then blast him down with your guns)—it's a hi-def tour de force of gorgeous mayhem. But playing it for yourself? So far, that's proving to be a different story. This sequel to the 20-year-old classic retains one of its predecessor's chief qualities: punishing difficulty. The game has a ton of promise, and it looks great, but we'll need more than just an hour with the opening levels to find out if controlling Nathan Spencer gets any easier…or any more fun. We're hopeful, considering that *Bionic Commando* offers a massive 15-hour single-player experience as well a full-featured eight-man multiplayer game with 16 different maps. Gary





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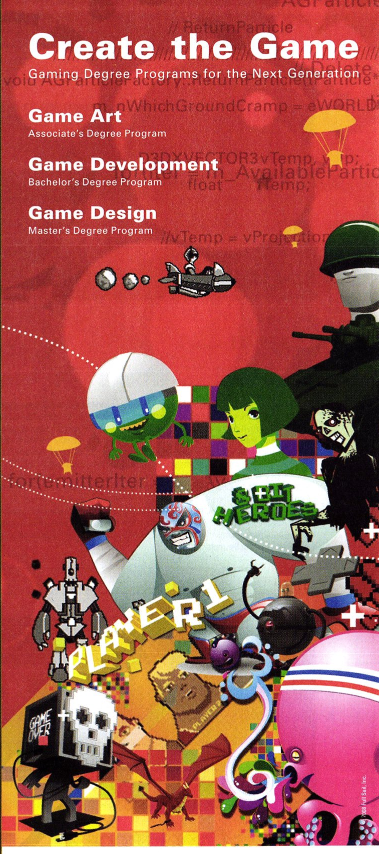

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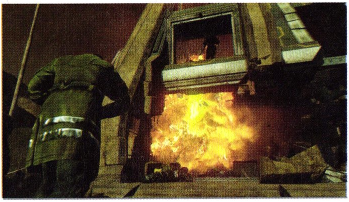
PlayStation Gallery



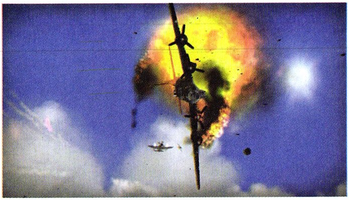
Red Faction:

Guerilla Hands-On

PS3 AVAILABLE: Q2 2009 GENRE: Third-person Shooter PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Volition, Inc.

Kids, if you find yourself in trouble here on Earth, just head to Mars to join your brother Dan in the mines and then get unwillingly swept up in a resistance movement when an evil army of liberators-turned-oppressors murders him! Or just play *Red Faction: Guerilla,* in which tough guy Alec Mason battles the Earth Defense Force—who actually freed the miners 50 years earlier in the original game—with all manner of futuristic tanks, mechs, and explosives. Oh, and a gun that literally disintegrates anything you shoot.

This Martian civil war plays out in an entirely open world that you must reclaim piece-by-piece—earning the support of the civilian population along the way—and in which nearly all events occur in real time (just because you ignored that radio message doesn't mean the battle's not going to happen). But the game's most awe-inspiring feature is the spectacular physics-based destruction system that lets you tear every scrap-metal-chic structure down brick by brick in an impressively realistic fashion. Maybe pre-rendered damage is finally becoming a thing of the past. Scott



Heroes Over Europe First Look

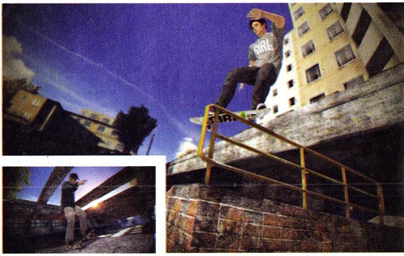
PS3 AVAILABLE: Spring 2009 GENRE: Air Combat PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Red Mile Entertainment

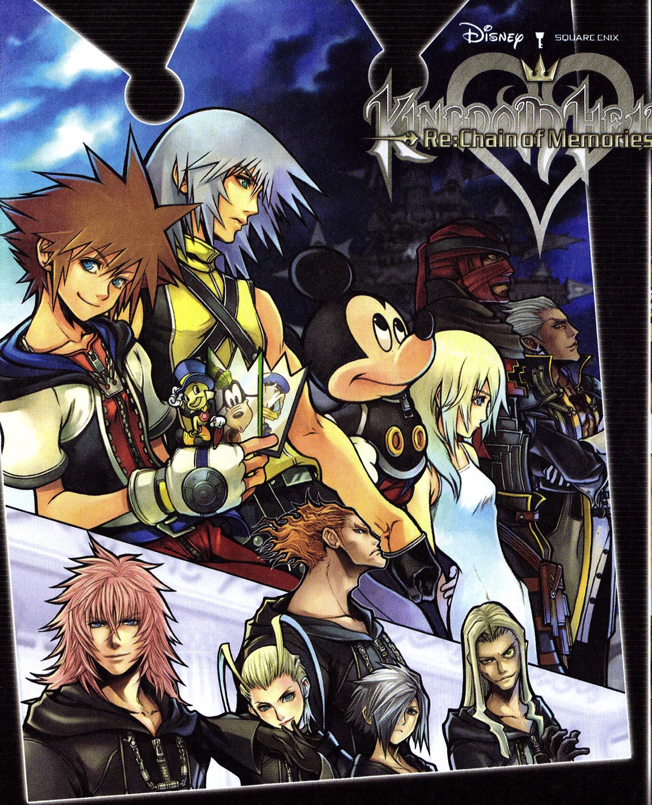
After some turbulence resulting in a year-long publishing delay, the European theatre successor to *Heroes Over the Pacific* is finally cleared for takeoff. *Heroes Over Europe* lets you take to the skies of World War II in Allied aircraft (British, American and Canadian air missions are currently confirmed), offering straight-up dogfights, bomber-escort missions, convoy attacks, and other challenges (including a thorough tutorial) spanning the war from the first attacks on London to the aerial bombardment of Berlin. *Heroes* is far closer to an "arcade" experience than any kind of true flight sim—no stalls to sweat here, in other words—and it's all presented with cocky, colorful chatter between pilots to flesh out the story and bookended with the nice touches of weathered, period-faithful, recruitment-poster and fuselage pinup-style artwork. Multiplayer supports up to 16 pilots, and downloadable content will be available right from day one, when hostilities begin early next year. Chris

Skate 2 Hands-On

PS3 AVAILABLE: Q1 2009 GENRE: Action Sports PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: EA Black Box

Don't worry, some of *Skate 2's* new features might scream *Tony Hawk,* but it definitely still feels like *Skate.* The analog stick-based trick system still proves addictively fun and responsive, and the deluge of new tricks adds a welcome layer of depth without feeling too cumbersome. But if you want to stick to the established basics of the first game, you can easily ignore the new tricks altogether. The same goes for the new off-the-board mechanics, which give you the option to walk around and rearrange the environment but never force you to. The new city is ridiculously massive and impressively diverse, yet certain areas—like the Matrix in downtown—still feel familiar. Also, cash can now be used to make areas more skate-friendly: you can drain pools, uncap rails, and eventually even buy parts of downtown to keep them rent-a-cop free. And the coolest new feature? Controlling your bails in midair. Super painful, but super addictive. Scott





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EVERYONE 10+
E 10+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Fantasy Violence

PlayStation 2

Disney

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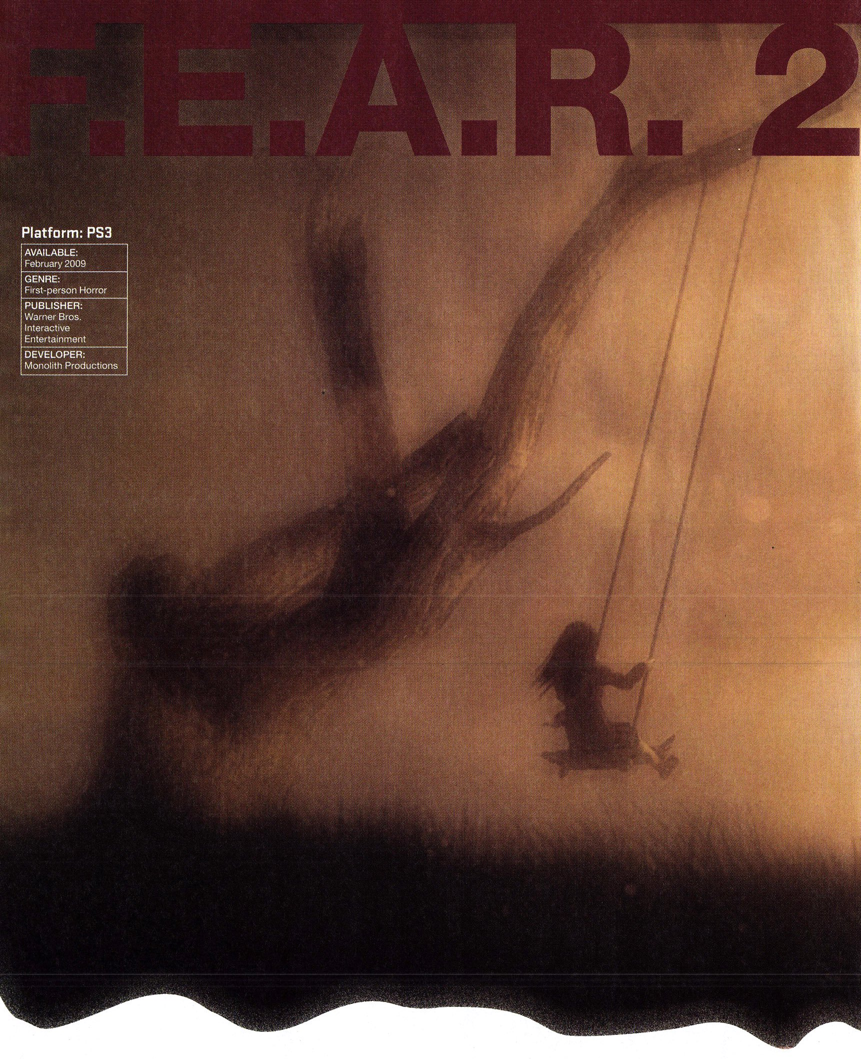
F.E.A.R. 2



Platform: PS3

AVAILABLE:	February 2009
GENRE:	First-person Horror
PUBLISHER:	Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment
DEVELOPER:	Monolith Productions

PROJECT ORIGIN

Step into the paranormal. And bring a semi-automatic assault rifle, flashlight, and security blanket

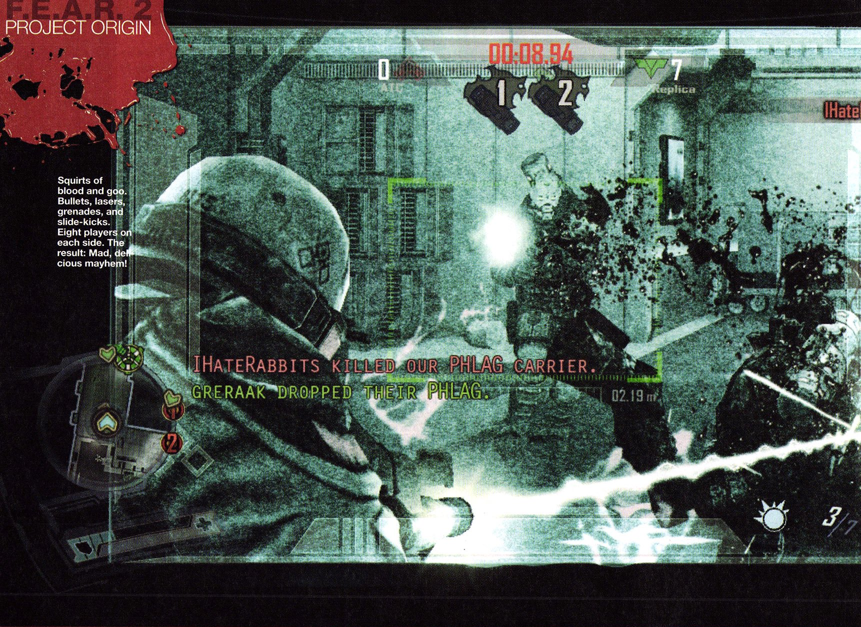
BY TERESA DUN

It's five o'clock and already dark as I step out of the Monolith offices in Kirkland, Washington. Hail has been pounding the streets and cars for who knows how long. The parking lot lights and little chips of falling ice blend into eerie shadows in the cold night. Dark and strange, a perfect breeding ground for ghosts, I think to myself, and then scoff at my own inanity. My flimsy Californian scarf isn't enough to ward off the chill, but I stand outside anyway, watching water bounce onto the black streets. Then, I close my eyes, lean my head against the wall to rest, and I see the pale face of a young girl glaring back at me, almost nose to nose. My eyes fly open, and suddenly the shadows all seem to take the shape of Alma: crazy-eyed, tangled black strands, drips of blood marring baby smooth skin. The shadows seem to float toward me, all of them hostile.

Shuddering, I decide to finish waiting for my cab inside the building. Surreal. The weather, and my day, spent soaking up all things *F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin.* I shrieked, yelped, heard ghost stories, and cursed under my breath at a quality assurance team that, I felt, showed no mercy during a multiplayer session where they *clearly* had the advantage.

Juxtapositions. Of emotions: the allure of a good scare versus the panic of one very cowardly editor. Of gameplay: the delicate balance of action and terror in single-player, a backdrop for the frenetic, fast-paced multiplayer. Of office culture: oozing creative intelligence and tireless devotion by day, superstitious dread by night.

And most importantly, a first-person horror title that is shaping up to be as strange, alluring, and unexpected as hail on what had originally started out as a sunny Tuesday afternoon.



IHATERABBITS KILLED OUR PHLAG CARRIER.
GRERAAK DROPPED THEIR PHLAG.

Squirts of blood and goo. Bullets, lasers, grenades, and slide-kicks. Eight players on each side. The result: Mad, delicious mayhem!

A BLOOD BATH...MINE

I don't know if there are stars in the sky. I'm barely conscious of the fact that I'm outdoors. In my peripheral vision, I see the remains of a train and the metal grate beneath my feet, but I have no time to study the landscape, even though the slick graphics in *F.E.A.R. 2* are already worthy of attention, months before release.

No, my attention is focused on the military vehicle in front of me, and in the back of my mind, I think smugly, "Vengeance is mine!" A row of text invites me to Press Square to hop into this god-sent-medium-of-sweet-sweet-revenge. How can I resist? Once ensconced inside the Elite Powered Armor unit—essentially a beefy mech with two modes of fire and a healthy amount of armor—I smirk.

After being shot, severed, gooed, lasered, burned alive, nailed dead to the wall (courtesy of the Hammerhead gun), and blown to bits by the QA team for the better part of an hour, they'd better pray I'll show them some compassion. I stomp my way to the center of the map, a bridge. I open fire. And I rain sweet destruction on the frail enemy team as they scamper about, hurling grenades at me like pebbles against my hard-armored ass. But before I can gloat, I see it. And groan.

It's the enemy team's EPA unit, controlled by someone with much better aim than me.

Within seconds, I'm launched out of my comfortable armored ride as it takes too much damage. I use it as cover for a second, then dash toward some boxes. I try to take stock of the battle conditions, but there's too much going on. Snipers on either end of the bridge, my team's and the enemy's, downing anyone not careful about their movements. In other words, me. Rockets, lasers, flamethrowers: With eight people on each of the two teams, with an EPA on each side, with tunnels and back pathways, it's too much. I'm like the proverbial deer in headlights, too stunned to move. Maybe I'm safest where I am.

But that's no fun. I decide to brave the onslaught and try to earn control of the zone smack in the middle of the bridge, but before I can take a single step, an enemy slide-kicks into me before knifing me to death. Damn.

"Tell them to go easy on me!" I whine to Tarl Raney, a Senior Associate Producer at Monolith, and my guide through *F.E.A.R. 2's* multiplayer.

He's sitting behind me, and I'm too busy choosing my new loadout to look, but I imagine he's grinning wryly as he says diplomatically, "I think they *are* going easy on you."

Embarrassing? Possibly, but I'm having too much fun to care. Heedless of the fact that I'll be dead again within a minute, I rush back into the battle, this time determined (hoping?) to take out a few enemies before I die.

CARNAGE

Later, I ask Raney what the team's vision was in creating the multiplayer. "A lot of it goes back to what the original *F.E.A.R.* multiplayer was about," he says thoughtfully.

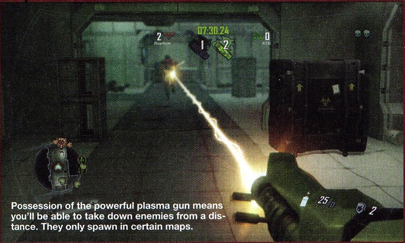
> "A lot of it goes back to what the original *F.E.A.R.* multiplayer was about," he says thoughtfully. "Fast-paced, very quick spawn, go in, blow the crap out of everything, die, then go back and do it again."

F.E.A.R. 2 on PS3, Not a Port!

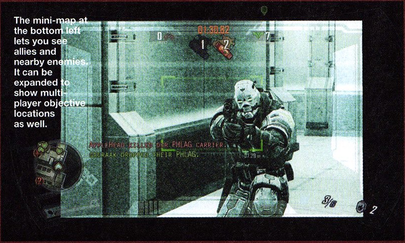
Given that *F.E.A.R.* was originally a PC series and that *F.E.A.R. 2* will be a multiplatform release, I don't blame you if you're afraid the PS3 version won't get enough attention to do the game justice. John O'Rorke, Principal Software Engineer at Monolith, assures us that this won't be the case.

HOW EXPERIENCED IS MONOLITH IN DEVELOPING FOR THE DIFFERENT PLATFORMS, ESPECIALLY THE PS3?
We [learned] in stages. We developed the initial engine on PC for *F.E.A.R.* one, and then we did *Condemned* one as a launch title for the 360. And then, for *Condemned 2,* we focused on the PS3. We basically took the technology and moved it onto the PS3. For *F.E.A.R. 2,* we worked on refining, optimizing, and taking better advantage of all three platforms. We're working on all three platforms in parallel, whereas in the past we had staggered them developmentally.

DID YOU HAVE ANY PARTICULAR PROBLEMS DEVELOPING FOR THE PS3?
We initially did, but we jumped through those hurdles in *Condemned 2.* So by the time we were in full production on *F.E.A.R. 2,* we had everything up and running. We want to make sure the people playing on PS3 are having as good of a time as the people playing on the 360.



Possession of the powerful plasma gun means you'll be able to take down enemies from a distance. They only spawn in certain maps.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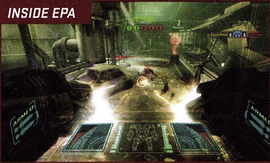
APPLEHEAD KILLED OUR PHLAG CARRIER.
GRERAAK DROPPED THEIR PHLAG.
3/6
2

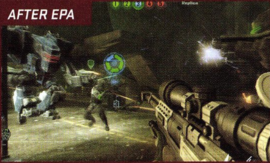
The mini-map at the bottom left lets you see allies and nearby enemies. It can be expanded to show multiplayer objective locations as well.

INSIDE EPA



The sweet power of being inside an EPA. Watch those suckers get obliterated by my missiles!

AFTER EPA



The shame of being ejected from an EPA. (See where all the weapons are pointing? That dead body lying on the floor encapsulates the multiplayer story of my Monolith trip!)

"Fast-paced, very quick spawn, go in, blow the crap out of everything, die, then go back and do it again."

Describes my experience perfectly, minus the "blow the crap out of everything" part, but once I learn the ins and outs of the nine maps and robust collection of weapons, I'll get there.

"You can't even tell what's going on sometimes," Raney continues, grinning in obvious pleasure at the purposeful mayhem of *F.E.A.R. 2's* multiplayer. "There's just so much stuff blowing up, body parts flying off the bridge, and everybody's on fire. It gets crazy in there. Especially with that EPA..."

I nod in total agreement as Raney says, "Once you're in that sucker, you don't want to leave."

At the same time, Raney emphasizes, "This isn't a hardcore PC game. We want this to be accessible to people."

I then ask him about the team's biggest inspiration in creating the multiplayer. *"Call of Duty,"* Raney states after a moment. "The level of polish they put into that game is pretty impressive. I feel like we're getting there, though we've obviously got a little ways to go." With a few months of development ahead of them and the amount of polish I witnessed in my multiplayer session (see sidebar for details about the multiplayer modes and maps), I'd say the team is right on track.

THE MANY FACETS OF MULTIPLAYER

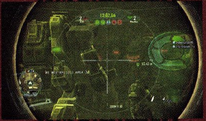
ARMORED FRONT
With three special maps just for this mode, your goal is to capture all five points on the map. Each team starts with two points and must elbow their way to the other half of the map, capturing points in order of near to far. This is the only mode with EPAs, one per team. Chaotic, explosive fun.

BLITZ
One team defends two Phlag canisters (basically, two bottles of goo). "We like to see goo spraying," Raney jokes. The other team tries to capture the Phlag canisters as many times as they can within a time limit. Then, the teams swap sides. Most Phlag captures wins.

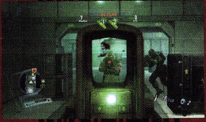
CONTROL
Three controllable points. Two teams of eight. Everyone runs around the map trying to capture and keep control of the three points. Intense and fast-paced.

FAILSAFE
The "hardcore" multiplayer mode, and the only elimination mode. (Once you're dead, you're dead. No respawns.) The bomb defusal mode.

DEATHMATCH / TEAM DEATHMATCH
If you don't know what this mode is, you've been living under a rock for way too long. Come, join us in some online play—we'll take it easy on you.



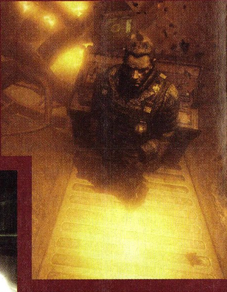
Two EPAs about to burst into chaotic, explosive action in Armored Front mode.



Sneaky sneak. Your teammates always appear green and enemies red. As someone tries to shoot you to steal your Phlag in Blitz mode, your buddy can take him out from behind.

The Story

Alma. A creepy, mysterious little girl who's psychic. And furious. In the first game, you freed her, playing as a different character, which led to a massive explosion that destroyed the city. In this game, you play as Michael Becket, a Delta Force operative. The game begins 30 minutes before that fateful explosion. Becket's told to find Genevieve Aristide, president of Armacham. Once you get to her, she explains that you're essential to her goals, but then the explosion erupts, and next thing you know, you wake up in a hospital, trying to figure out what's going on. Only one fact is certain: now that Alma's free, she's not going to play nice. Oh, and one other tidbit. Dave Matthews also promises, "We answer a ton of questions in *F.E.A.R. 2.* All that stuff about what the projects really meant and what Fettel was about gets explained."



AN ARTFUL, SUBTLE BLEND

Multiplayer made me want to scream angry curses at the QA team, but the single-player demo I try next makes me scream, period.

I control Michael Becket, protagonist of *F.E.A.R. 2,* and walk through an elementary school. I see vivid colors, crayon drawings hanging on walls, flickering lights, pools of blood, and not a single child. Creepy. My flashlight is on, and as I pray none of my enemies spot it, I suddenly hear the school bell ring. Childish laughter echoes around the empty halls. In the distance, I hear a baby crying, and a bucket slides across the hallway 10 yards ahead of me. "But no one's here!" I think frantically to myself.

I inch forward, scared of the shadowy alley from which that terrifying bucket originated. The music flares into a creepy score. I quickly scamper back a few steps, hoping to undo whatever evil I may have triggered, but the music doesn't go away. Finally, I decide to just run for it, hoping that I'll pass whatever "scare" the game has for me.

I make it through the hallway. Nothing happens. Instead, I reach a room with normal, human enemies, and I sigh in relief. Guns I can deal with; ghostly psychic girls I cannot. Dave Matthews, the Primary Art Lead, explains that the goal is to "break down the expectations of players. When a player assumes a scene is going to be one way, let them assume it for a while and then tear that expectation down."

As I start to settle into the familiar first-person shooter aspect of the game, I see that enemy troops are working a flanking maneuver on my position. We're in what looks like the teacher's lunch area. I push over a table and duck behind it, a wall guarding my right side, thinking that I'll take them out one by one from my safe position.

Not quite. Seeing my cautious battle stance, the enemies try to flush me out. They crawl around, surrounding me. I shoot as many as I can, generously utilizing Becket's Slow-mo ability. (Monolith is tight-lipped about why Becket has this skill, though I do know he had to undergo an operation in the game to obtain it.) It's no good. Even slowed down, the enemy works as a cohesive unit and charges me from too many angles. I fall.

I hand the controller to my guide and tell him to try. He takes a much more aggressive approach, pushing forward with grenades, moving from cover to cover. And, surprisingly, the AI reacts. It's *their* turn to be cautious. They push over tables and duck behind shelves, waiting for opportune moments to shoot. They even push objects off

Will there be downloadable content and Trophies? "Of course!" But when asked to reveal specifics, the developers just smile and shrug. Damn them.

On foot, it's deserted streets, a god-awful enemy (no spoilers!), and a frantic struggle to survive. Inside an EPA, though? It's about fearlessly blasting everything in your path!

The Dead Bird

Oh, the pains developers will go through for the sake of their game!

"While we were walking around [an undisclosed setting for a location shoot], we saw this dead bird that had been there for months. It was shriveled up, almost mummified. Nobody wanted to touch it because it was bad mojo. Eventually, somebody nudged it. At that point, the audio guys were like 'it's game on.' They started poking it and squishing it and getting the bones cracking. They sampled all this audio, so when you hear bones cracking in the game, that's from this little bird." —DAVE MATTHEWS

countertops to get a clearer view, eventually taking down Becket. I'm stunned at their intelligence.

Matthews explains it later. "The way our AI operates is all stimulus-based. Nothing is really scripted. We educate the AI about the environment—these elements are cover, these others are combat opportunities—and the more we educate them, the more intelligent they are about how they're going to use it against the player. Then, we add another onionskin of complexity by allowing the player to modify the space, and that gives additional stimulus to the AI. That's what makes them feel smart."

The rest of the single-player demo I try is varied: an outdoor battle sequence (with rockets, snipers, and exploding cars), some EPA action (yes! I'm invincible again!), shadows creeping from the edges of the screen, Alma clawing at me when I least expect it (my scream was heard down the hall), disconcerting music, dream sequences…

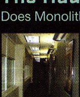
"That's one of the key tenants of *F.E.A.R.* This psychological horror element mixed in with these moments of frenetic, fast-paced action," says Matthews. The end result? A truly diverse, unpredictable experience.

TWILIGHT

It's still hailing when my cab arrives to take me to the airport. With one last glance at the Monolith offices, I run through the wetness and into the warmth of the car. I don't spy any hint of Alma, but then she never seems to appear when I expect her to. What a day. *F.E.A.R. 2:* a mish-mash of white-hot adrenaline and chilling terror, of quick, action-heavy combat and slow, suspenseful pacing. Combos that feel unintuitive, oxymoronic. But after witnessing the team's devotion to the project and hearing the amount of detail and care they're lavishing upon even the smallest parts of the game, I have a hunch that re-uniting with Alma this coming February will be an unearthly, heart-stopping affair. ■

The Haunted Hallway

Does Monolith have its own ghost?



"These two hallways right here? At night, they're really weird. Right as it opens up to go around the corner to the cafeteria. I don't understand why, but it's a creepy section of the building," says Dave Matthews. "We had an animator that used to sit in the corner of the building. It's 2:30 at night and he hears this [whiny, creepy cry]. At first, he thinks it's a baby. He puts headphones on, but he still hears it, so he takes them back off and listens. It stops. He continues working, and it happens again. So he gets up, walks around, but no one's here. He sits back down, and hears it again. He's like, "I'm done for the night." He starts walking, and by the window, he looks outside. There's a guy with a RC car, and the sound was the car screeching."

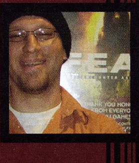
But why's there a guy outside playing with toys at 2:30 at night?! I say, "Ghost!"

Monolith Productions: A Company Profile

FOUNDED: 1994
LOCATION: Kirkland, WA
OWNED BY: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment
PORTFOLIO HIGHLIGHTS:
- *No One Lives Forever* series (2000, 2002)
- *Aliens vs. Predator 2* (2001)
- *Condemned* series (2005, 2008)

Every single day, a group of developers at Monolith gather around two kitchen tables and talk about what inspires them. Comics, films, images, anything. As I sit in the kitchen, eating a sandwich, I strain to hear what they are talking about, hoping to catch some juicy detail about *F.E.A.R. 2* or an unannounced title they aren't talking about yet. I sneak a look at my escort, to see if she notices, but she just smiles. It wouldn't matter if I heard anything. Whether in the kitchen, in one of the many convoluted hallways that snaked through the office, or in the red-walled lobby, it doesn't matter. Why? Because like many other developers, the folks at Monolith give codenames to all the important elements of their games. Shucks!

TARL RANEY

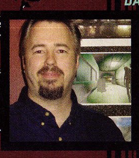


POSITION: Senior Associate Producer
NUMBER OF YEARS AT MONOLITH: Four
WHAT HE HAS TO SAY ABOUT THE COMPANY: "With any company, it comes back to the people. I love the people I work with. They're friendly. That's definitely my number one. I love the passion everybody puts in. Oh, and we make some really great games."
WHAT SCARES HIM: Realistic horror. "Where it's real people in the sticks. I'm from Kansas so that hits home for me. Driving down a dirt road. There's a farmhouse, with those orange phosphorescent glow lights. Those freak me out, I don't know why." And, "the first hour of *Jeepers Creepers.*" And last but not least, "spiders!"

JOHN O'RORKE

POSITION: Principal Software Engineer, Engine Architect
NUMBER OF YEARS AT MONOLITH: Eight
WHAT HE HAS TO SAY ABOUT THE COMPANY: "I like each project for different reasons. *N.O.L.F. 2* was a lot of fun. We had a lot of laughs. *F.E.A.R.* I liked because it was pretty cutting edge. And *F.E.A.R. 2* is looking really good. I'm really happy with how it's turning out! It's a lot of fun to work here."
WHAT SCARES HIM: "Meetings and surprise interviews!" (He's only half joking, I think.) "The kind of games I love are the ones where the player feels really vulnerable…games like *Fatal Frame*. It's just a slow environmental build-up of tension, the inability to escape. You're trapped and there's all this stuff coming from all angles. It's the omnipresent kind of fear that starts to teeter into the realm of panic."

DAVE MATTHEWS



POSITION: Primary Art Lead
NUMBER OF YEARS AT MONOLITH: Four
WHAT HE HAS TO SAY ABOUT THE COMPANY: "It's a testament to the skills of the people here what we can achieve. I'm constantly surprised at how we set the bar and end up raising it again a couple months later. Leap frog off each other. I love working here."
WHAT SCARES HIM: "It sounds really lame, but my biggest fear is to be ordinary. To live an ordinary and uninspiring life." (From the all the stories he has, I'd say he has nothing to worry about!) Also, "complete darkness is pretty darn scary, where any direction you look, your eyes can't adjust. That complete void of spacial awareness."

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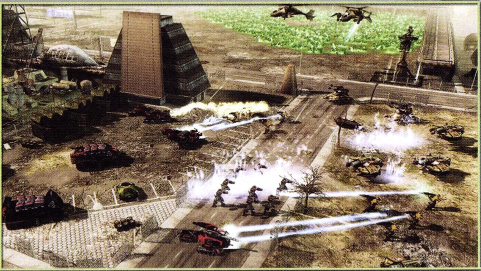
OLETO TICKET

DEMOS

MODS



PATCHES

EXPAND GAMIN

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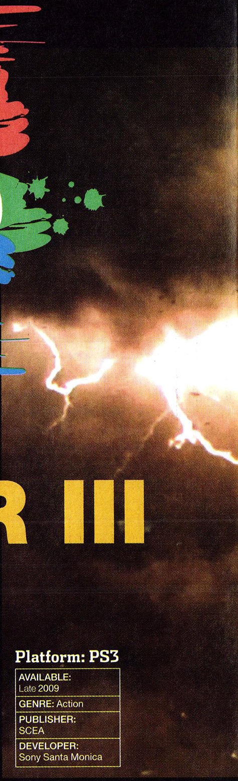
G KNOWLEDGE

TOP 10 GAMES OF '09



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GOD OF WAR III

Vengeance comes to the PS3

Tidbits. Scraps and crumbs off a table. That's all Sony is feeding hungry *God of War* fans, and you *know* we're lapping it up like desperate scavengers. In the epic conclusion to *God of War II,* Kratos ascended Olympus with the help of a Titan legion and made his first strike in a hate-inspired war against Zeus. Now, armed with little more than a trailer that explains "Hey, Kratos still looks mean!" and a 2009 release date, we're left to speculate how *God of War III* will wrap up this tantalizing tale of alternate Greek mythology. One fact is certain: with the wealth of combat-focused action games already gracing the PS3, *GoW III* is going to have to innovate (even if it's just a bit), throw in a few more boobies (kidding!), and polish, polish, polish, if it wants to tower over the competition.

Platform: PS3

AVAILABLE: Late 2009

GENRE: Action

PUBLISHER: SCEA

DEVELOPER: Sony Santa Monica

The core combat in *God of War* has always been exceptional: the addictive, satisfying blend of combos, magic, defensive moves, and timing. But to keep from feeling sterile in comparison to games like *Devil May Cry 4* or *Ninja Gaiden Sigma, GoW III* could use a couple of new tricks. Perhaps a Sixaxis dodge-roll? Or a controllable combat camera? Or a fully interactive, non-censored, female-induced health restoration scene? (You know which one we're talking about, but we're joking…mostly.) We're not too worried. Each sequel in the *GoW* series has seen a relevant expansion in combat, whether in combos or magic, and we're confident Sony Santa Monica will find

"Each sequel in the *GoW* series has seen a relevant expansion in combat, whether in combos or magic, and we're confident Sony Santa Monica will find some way to make ripping the wings off a harpy even more enjoyable."

some way to make ripping the wings off a harpy even *more* enjoyable.

And since this is Kratos's first PS3 appearance, we're praying for a broadened scope of puzzles and platforming to expand upon the beloved crank-turning of the earlier games. While we don't expect to see our ornery pal running on walls like some Persian prince, if the previous titles' grappling mechanic is any indication, we'll be seeing more, er, sophisticated methods of traversing the terrain, not just pulling levers and kicking down doors. And if the finale of the PSP's *Chains of Olympus* was any tease, a *Shadow of the Colossus*-like boss segment may be in order.

Meanwhile, we have to wait patiently to see exactly what SCEA means by "The End Begins" for *GoW III.* It's tough to say where the plot is headed, but we're sure that the story's phenomenal twists and turns will be as exciting as swinging a chained sword through the mouth of a minotaur and that Kratos will be loud, angry, and violent. Oh, and there will be breasts. There always are.

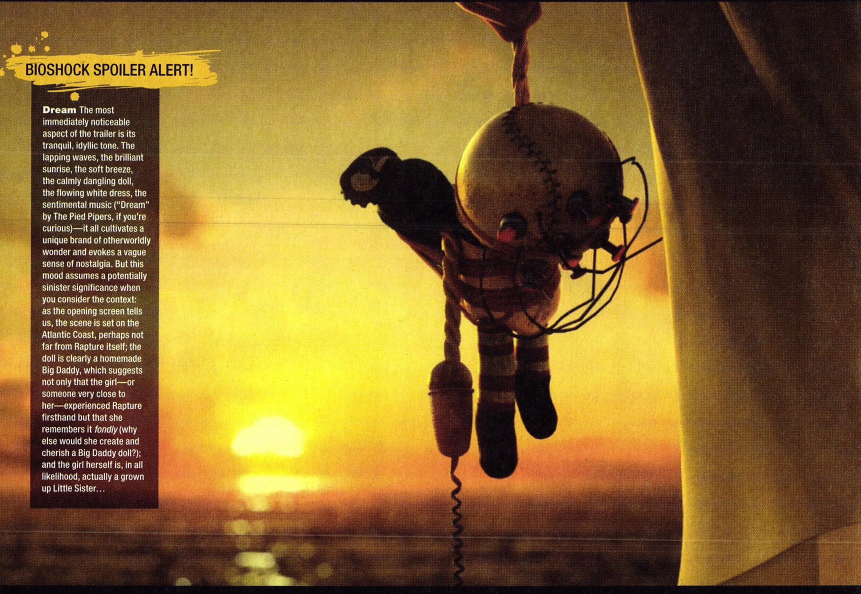
BioShock 2: Sea of Dreams

Rapture Reloaded

Platform: PS3

AVAILABLE: Spring 2009	
GENRE: FPS	
PUBLISHER: 2K Games	
DEVELOPER: 2K Marin	

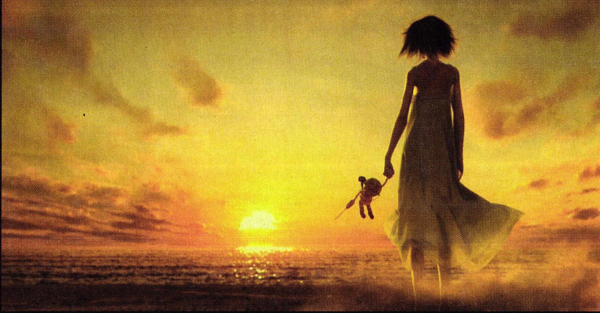
If you haven't yet finished the original *BioShock,* go do so immediately, this story will be here when you get back. The original is one of the finest gaming experiences of this console generation, and more importantly, you need to finish it because we're totally going to spoil the hell out of the story. If you have managed to conquer Rapture, then you surely understand why *BioShock 2* easily made our list of 2009's most anticipated games. Unfortunately, developer 2K Marin remains steadfastly tight-lipped about the forthcoming follow-up, but did release this mysterious yet tantalizing trailer. For your mild amusement and possible enlightenment, we present our expert deconstruction of the clip and offer wild conjecture about what it might spell for the prequel…or sequel.

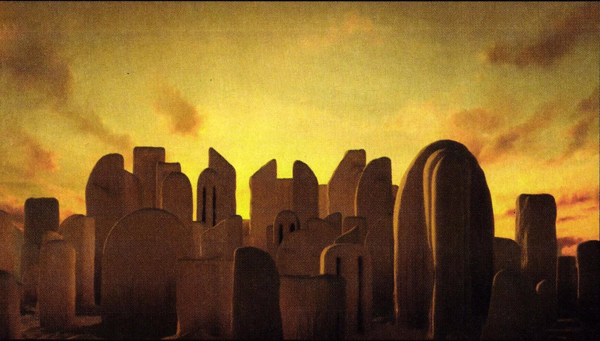


BIOSHOCK SPOILER ALERT!

Dream The most immediately noticeable aspect of the trailer is its tranquil, idyllic tone. The lapping waves, the brilliant sunrise, the soft breeze, the calmly dangling doll, the flowing white dress, the sentimental music ("Dream" by The Pied Pipers, if you're curious)—it all cultivates a unique brand of otherworldly wonder and evokes a vague sense of nostalgia. But this mood assumes a potentially sinister significance when you consider the context: as the opening screen tells us, the scene is set on the Atlantic Coast, perhaps not far from Rapture itself; the doll is clearly a homemade Big Daddy, which suggests not only that the girl—or someone very close to her—experienced Rapture firsthand but that she remembers it *fondly* (why else would she create and cherish a Big Daddy doll?); and the girl herself is, in all likelihood, actually a grown up Little Sister…

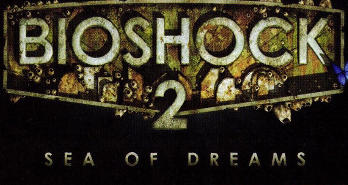
Little Sister Though her apparent age and location provide some indication of her Little Sister status, the Big Daddy doll creates an undeniable link between her and Rapture and could even be considered evidence of a Stockholm Syndrome-esque affection for the diving-suit-clad monsters who once protected her, misplaced as this daughterly instinct may be. Even more compelling are her apparent psychokinetic powers. The moment she tilts her head, the wind kicks up and a very Rapture-looking city begins to spring from the ground. Considering the genetic experiments conducted in Rapture, it's not difficult to believe that she is in fact building sandcastles with her mind. Also, the fact that the girl apparently knows what Rapture looks like and is staring out at the sea where it lies suggests again that not only is she a Little Sister, but that she actually longs to return to Rapture. The idea that all of her wistful nostalgia is directed at such a horrific place is a chilling notion indeed.





Rapture But the implication that she is prepared to act on this nostalgia is even more disturbing (and revealing) than the nostalgia itself. Whether she's motivated by blind idealization or simple homesickness, her construction of a faux-Rapture—coupled with all the imagery of newness and creation, such as the sunrise and the butterfly that appears at the end of the trailer—foreshadows a revitalization or recreation of Rapture. However, the manner in which the city will be reborn is ambiguous at best. Will she build an entirely new city based on Rapture or will she return to the old Rapture and attempt to restore its initial glory? Regardless of which ending you reached in the first game, the city itself was not destroyed and—thanks to the Vita-Chambers—some of the original characters might not be as dead as you think, so the next game could easily be a return to the true Rapture. In fact, this Little Sister could be the female version of the first game's protagonist, genetically programmed to return to Rapture should anything go wrong.

Rebirth Unfortunately, the title screen only contributes to this ambiguity. The logo is nearly identical to that of the original game except it is now encrusted with barnacles and algae. If the logo represents the city of the first game and the algae represents the passage of time, then the title screen suggests that the game will return to the original Rapture after several years. On the other hand, the butterfly—a classic symbol of rebirth and renewal—hints at the beginning of something entirely new. Either way, the title screen serves as a strong indicator that *BioShock 2* will be a sequel not prequel (as proclaimed by the widely circulating rumor). But which of the first game's endings will it follow? The most interesting answer is, of course, neither. While not particularly likely, the story of *BioShock 2* could actually run concurrently with that of the first game, showing you the same city at the same time but through the eyes of a different character. Like, say, Dr. Tenenbaum. Perhaps the Little Sister on the beach doesn't miss Rapture so much as she misses her surrogate mother.



And there you have it. While the trailer does an excellent job of creating many possible scenarios for the setting of the second *BioShock,* the most likely case seems to be a sequel involving a Little Sister who longs to return to Rapture and somehow attempts to bring the city back to life. Bare in mind, however, that this is all pure speculation. And besides, considering the subtitle, maybe the whole thing is just a dream…

Platform: PS3

AVAILABLE: February 2009	
GENRE: Action	
PUBLISHER: SCEA	
DEVELOPER: Guerrilla Games	

Hands-on Preview

Killzone 2

Potential. Realized.

Not a one of them can avoid a deep sigh. Not a single member of the *Killzone 2* development team at Guerrilla Games refrains from an eye roll, chuckle, or wry smile when mentioning (often in exasperated "done already" tones) the preview trailer released in 2005 as a statement of intent by Sony of PlayStation 3's potential. "I'm going to roll the bloody trailer one more time," declares studio Managing Director Herman Hulst, resigned to the need to address this hot button, fan-fuelled topic. "It certainly set expectations externally," he adds wryly, "but it set them internally, too." That's pressure, challenge, expectation, anticipation, and so many questions all rolled up in one cinematic showcase.

Three years later, it's time for answers; it's time to prove that ambition levels can not only be achieved, but crested. Subsequent video proofs of concept illustrated the detail applied to environmental damage from your military onslaught and to hit responses on Helghast peppered with bullets from your powerful, futuristic arsenal of liberating death. "You're on Helghan; we want to make you feel unwelcome," Hulst adds.

It takes nary a second, just your first encounter, to check box number one: you're invading an alien planet, and these bastards want you dead. But getting to this point, where the 10 single-player maps and eight multiplayer maps (for two to 32 players) tell a compelling story of planetary invasion has taken its sweet, sweet time. Why? We went inside Guerrilla Games to ask all the parties responsible.

By Design

When Mathijs de Jonge came on board as Game Director, his stint as designer on the PSP game *Killzone Liberation* provided a solid grounding in the world story, but he discovered a dissonant outline. "The system and ideas were there," he told us, "but it wasn't coherent." Armed with a master Excel spreadsheet to track asset revelation (when you earn or get to use new weapons, vehicles (oh yes, you'll like the vehicles), buddies, and information), de Jonge has organized the wildly varied levels into a format that reveals the origin of arch-enemy Visari, his plot against Earth, and your role as part of the invasion force ensuring Helghan doesn't get a chance to bring the war back to your home planet.

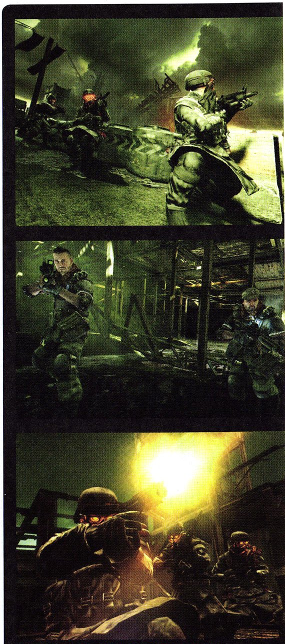
The environmental design goes beyond varying the look of battlegrounds, delving so deep that even wind effects can impact the gameplay flow ("throw a grenade into the wind and it'll be blown back at you," says de Jonge). On the surface the focus on maintaining a first-person view at all times required evolving a cover system for effective protection. You'll need it, too, given the volume and intensity of the late-game encounters, where deciding which weapon to use of the two you can carry can make the difference between progression and being overwhelmed. Some help will come from buddies accompanying you on many missions. "We want the AI buddies to always feel like they're helping out," says Rob Heald, designer of the AI systems in *Killzone 2.* The enemies themselves, such as the elite shock troopers, will use cover themselves, as well as flanking maneuvers on your position. Decisions such as the AI throwing grenades and its aggression level are impacted by which of the three difficulty levels you select (a fourth super-hard option is unlocked after completing the game.)

Future Vision

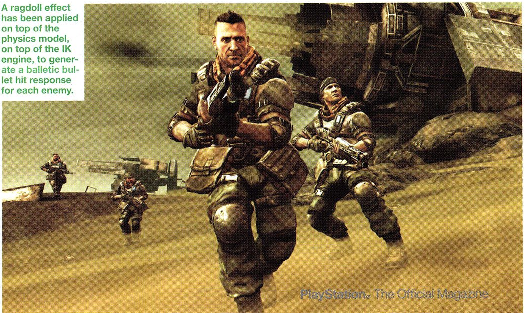
"Make it hostile. Make it feel dangerous," says art director Jan-Bart van Beek of the visual identity required to bring Visari's Helghan to life. With lightning storms crackling all around, the buildings need protection from the elements, creating scenes of huge conductors poking skyward from various surfaces. Since the planet doesn't have massive oceans, super-tanker trains have been built to allow the transportation of heavy goods. Even robots have a distinct visual style. Helghan maintains a logical consistency throughout, with the planet's environmental and political situation shaping practical and stylistic decisions by the design team. The result is an alien planet with a cohesion you often don't get in these kinds of landscapes, adding a layer of believability and purpose to your liberating onslaught.

The long-term vision for *Killzone 2* resides online, with five multiplayer modes created for eight maps at ship time. While co-op is not part of the initial release, don't be surprised if that appears some time down the line as downloadable content, along with a comprehensive Home space to hang out, find games, and add more background. Each of the maps can be customized with a huge variety of options, and you can save out your own personal preferences as a preset, and then select that preset to save time. You'll also gain experience towards a persistent rank, and for matchmaking the game will try to keep players within four ranks to ensure the right balance of abilities among each player. Over 100 stats are tracked by the system, and you'll be able to compare your skills against friends (and enemies)

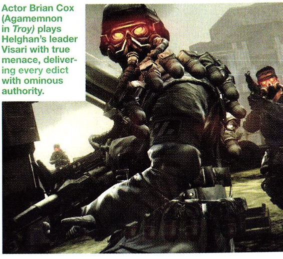
What *Killzone 2* now promises, years after that initial pre-rendered vision of futuristic war, is a dynamic, stylish, action-packed shooter that should deserve numerous playthroughs. Seriously, the team highlights its attention to detail with good reason. Helghan is a spectacularly well-realized world. Your role in it, as liberator and aggressor, will take you on an incredible rollercoaster ride. We know because we've played it, and that's what allows us to state, just a few short months from release, that *Killzone 2's* long-term potential is about to be magnificently realized.



Development Director Arjan Brussee showed us one scene lit by 160 individual light sources. Hovering robots had six individual lights. Many of these technology advances have been achieved by sending some of the rendering requirements to the 3.2GHz SPUs, rather than forcing it all through the graphics processor.



A ragdoll effect has been applied on top of the physics model, on top of the IK engine, to generate a balletic bullet hit response for each enemy.



Actor Brian Cox (Agamemnon in *Troy)* plays Helghan's leader Visari with true menace, delivering every edict with ominous authority.

Platform: PS3

AVAILABLE: 2009	
GENRE: Racing	
PUBLISHER: Codemasters	
DEVELOPER: Codemasters Studios	

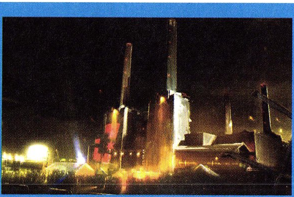
DiRT 2

Racin' Dirty

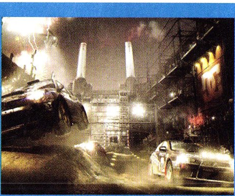
With *GRID* arguably claiming the mantel of best racing game of 2008, and with the first *DiRT* game being the best-selling off-road racer of 2007, our anticipation level is at redline for Codemasters' next racing excursion, *DiRT 2.* The game will aim to exhibit the new revitalized attitude that's infused rally racing since its inclusion in the X-Games, with an emphasis on the excitement, atmosphere, and drama of the event. Codemasters managed to find the exact right blend between satisfying simulation and arcade fun on the tarmac in *GRID,* so we can't wait to see the result when *DiRT 2* heads off-road.

ROAD TRIP

CONFIRMED TRACKS
- **Utah, USA:** Creek Trailblazer
- **Malaysia:** Rawang Rally Run
- **London, UK:** Battersea Battle



The retired Battersea power station once provided 20-percent of London's electricity. The *DiRT 2* concept art depicts the iconic landmark's transformation into—as Codemasters describes it—an industrial amphitheatre of modern sports racing. Oooo…fancy.



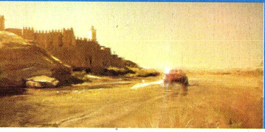
Nighttime rally racing in the rotting husk of a forgotten monument to human aspiration and progress—it's an ironic commentary to mankind's dichotomy in a post-modern existence. Really.

Under the hood...

- 7 Vehicle classes
- Genre-leading collection of officially licensed rally cars and off-road vehicles
- Double the car and track graphical detail of *GRID*
- New handling physics and engine damage effects
- Wider selection of race formats: off-road solo, multi-car, and multi-class racing
- Full online functionality with new social features

Ahhh, the classic rivalry: Mitsubishi Evo versus the Subaru WRX STi.

> **"We're pitching players against the most spectacular and dangerous environments in the real world."**
>
> –Gavin Raeburn, Sr. Executive Producer

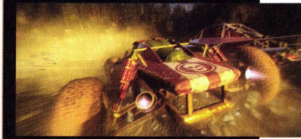


UNCONFIRMED TRACK
• MOROCCO

Codemasters hasn't actually confirmed a Morocco track for the game, but if there isn't, they probably shouldn't have sent us concept art labeled "Morocco."

Masters of Racing

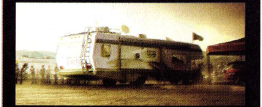
With *GRID* and *DiRT 2* dominating the race-track, you'd think Codemasters would be satisfied. But two more Codemasters racers are headed our way in 2009, each promising a distinctive new driving experience.



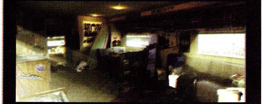
With its jerry-rigged off-road rides and post-apocalypse look, early screenshots of *FUEL* (above) could easily be mistaken as outtakes from a new *Mad Max* movie. Success and survival depends on navigating the Catch-22 situation of having enough fuel to race and winning races to acquire more fuel. The game's huge 5,000 square mile play environment is a major attraction.

NASCAR may hog the racing headlines in the U.S., but Formula 1 is the premier racing series in the world. Reportedly, F1 races number an *average* of 55 million viewers. Codemasters acquired the exclusive licensing rights to the series in May and we're expecting nothing less than a superb racing simulator.

Rolling Palace



A personalized RV serves as *DiRT's* front end and gateway to new locations, giving you an immersive interface and the perception of being part of a World Tour.



Upgrade your RV's interior with new equipment, accessories, event posters, and trophies as you progress through the game. Man, I hope my mom doesn't drop by and sees this mess.

Platform: PS3

AVAILABLE: 2009
GENRE: Boxing
PUBLISHER: EA Sports
DEVELOPER: EA Sports

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 4

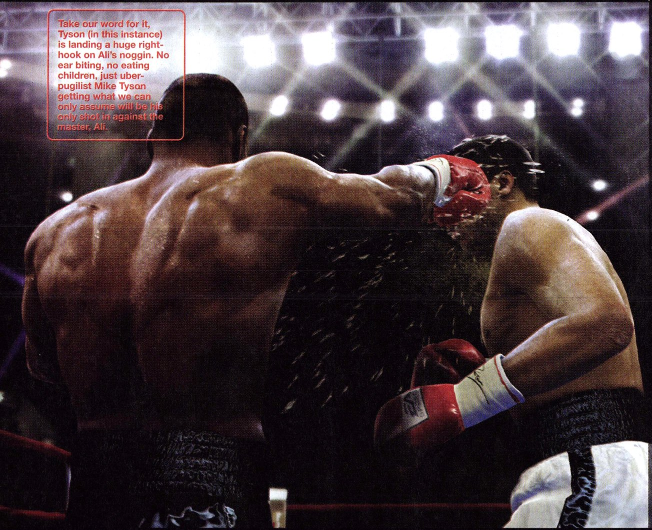
Muhammad Ali vs. Mike Tyson. That's all you need to know!

No doubt about it, *Fight Night Round 3* was good. Very good. Better, more complete, and certainly more accessible than most gamers probably expected. This follow-up has taken a while to get ready for primetime, almost certainly in part due to changes to the development setup and team. But the upshot—or uppercut, if you will—is that the new *Fight Night* will pit the most dominant heavyweights in history against each other.

The speed and feral power of Mike Tyson will be delivered through a brand-new engine designed to allow each fighter's unique style to be mapped accurately. So Ali will float and sting like the butterfly and bee under your analog stick control. Other fighters on the roster? Unannounced, but expect returns from most, if not all of the guys who made *Round 3* so memorable.

In addition to the new gameplay engine, EA Sports is promising a new animation system that uses physics to capture the slow-mo movement of gloved fist interfacing with chiseled face. In building on the core slug-fest that was executed so effectively last time out, *Round 4* promises to add gameplay mechanics that recreate inside fighting, where the brawlers use (or sap) so much energy trying to create the opening for a knockout shot.

Even blocked punches and glancing blows will be measured and factor into the detailed balance of effort and fatigue against the requirement to throw jabs, wear down your opponent, and then land a devastating power punch. With the potential for online play to allow career building (following the pattern set by EA Sports' other games), we've got high hopes that *Fight Night Round 4* will build still further on the past success and deliver the kind of bone-crushing action gamers love!



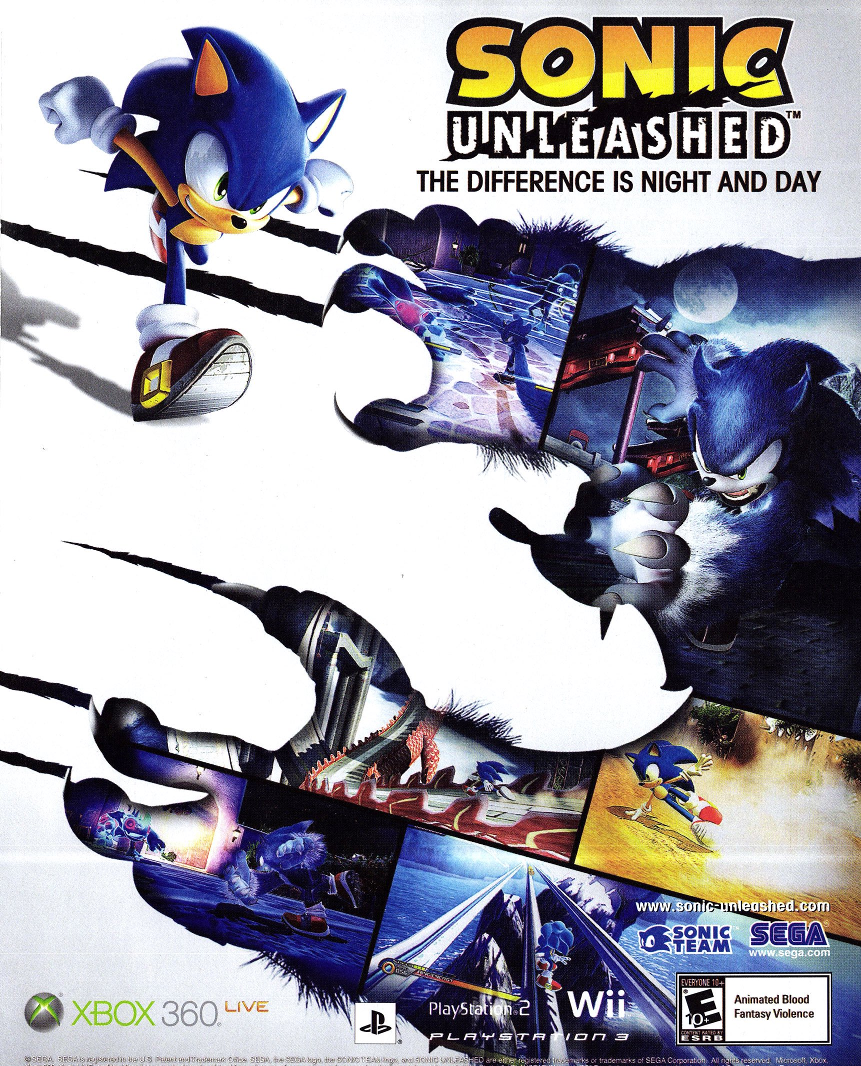
Take our word for it, Tyson (in this instance) is landing a huge right-hook on Ali's noggin. No ear biting, no eating children, just uber-pugilist Mike Tyson getting what we can only assume will be his only shot in against the master, Ali.

He's so pretty. He's so pret...oh, that's gonna leave a mark. This floating butterfly suddenly got stung itself. But you don't need to be a purist boxing fan to appreciate the opportunity to put these legendary heavyweights in the same ring. Seconds out...

SPIKE
GET MORE ACTION

See more at the Spike VGAs

We don't have too many specific details on EA's bigger plans for *Fight Night Round 4*, but you'll be able to see the first-ever trailer of the game (which will start to answer some of our questions) during the Spike TV VGAs, which air on Spike TV on December 14th. Set the Tivo now!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PlayStation 2
Wii
PLAYSTATION 3

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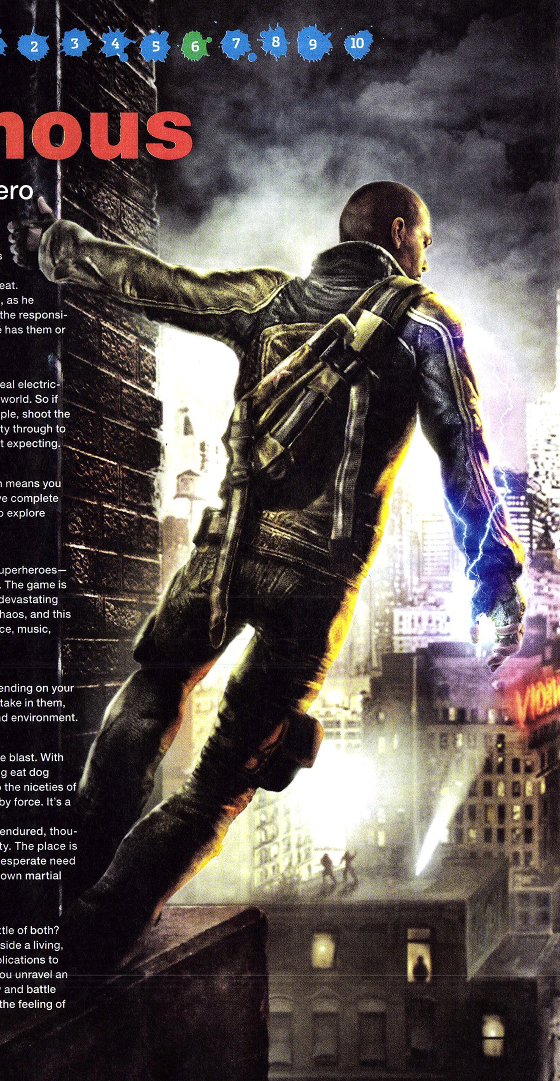
inFamous

Every city needs a hero



Cole

Cole is a regular city guy struggling to make ends meet as a courier. Then one day he gets super powers, and his entire world changes in a heartbeat. It's this event that really defines Cole as a person, as he struggles to learn how to control his powers and the responsibility they bring, not understanding the reason he has them or their full potential.

Super Powers

The powers are electrical-based, and much like real electricity, will conduct through any metal objects in the world. So if bad guys are hiding behind a dumpster, for example, shoot the dumpster and the metal will conduct the electricity through to the other side and give them a shock they weren't expecting.

Sandbox Game

inFamous is an open world sandbox game, which means you can climb and interact with anything. You will have complete freedom of a city in chaos. Empire City is yours to explore vertically and horizontally.

Tone

inFamous takes a realistic, modern-day look at superheroes—it's not set in a fantasy world, it's set in our world. The game is dark, urban, and industrial. The aftermath of the devastating explosion has left the city and civilians in bleak chaos, and this is reflected in every aspect of the game experience, music, city, and story.

Organic City Ecology

Watch the citizens and city react and evolve depending on your actions. Events will unfold based on the role you take in them, creating broader reactions in the city's people and environment.

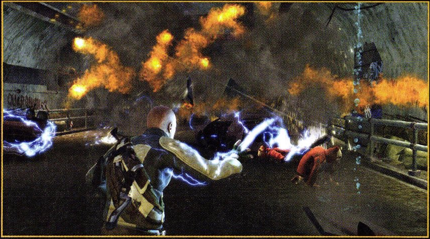
Empire City

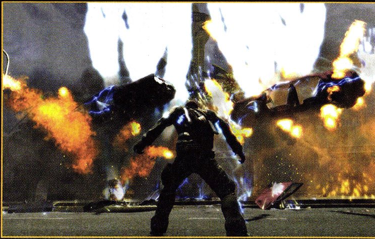
You really don't want to be in Empire City after the blast. With no effective law enforcement the streets are a dog eat dog world where at any moment someone might drop the niceties of civilized society and start taking what they want by force. It's a scary and bleak place.

Yet, despite all the problems Empire City has endured, thousands of everyday people remain stuck in the city. The place is packed with a weary and scared population in desperate need of relief from the gangs that have imposed their own martial law on the various neighborhoods.

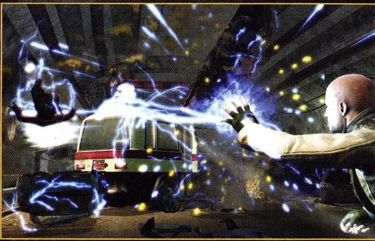
Duality

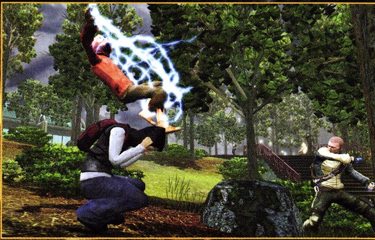
Exact revenge? Protect the innocent? Maybe a little of both? These are the situations you'll face as you play inside a living, breathing city. Your actions will have broader implications to the citizens and city around you. *inFamous* lets you unravel an evolving mystery, experience fame and/or infamy and battle powerful, iconic villains…all the while giving you the feeling of becoming a modern day superhero.

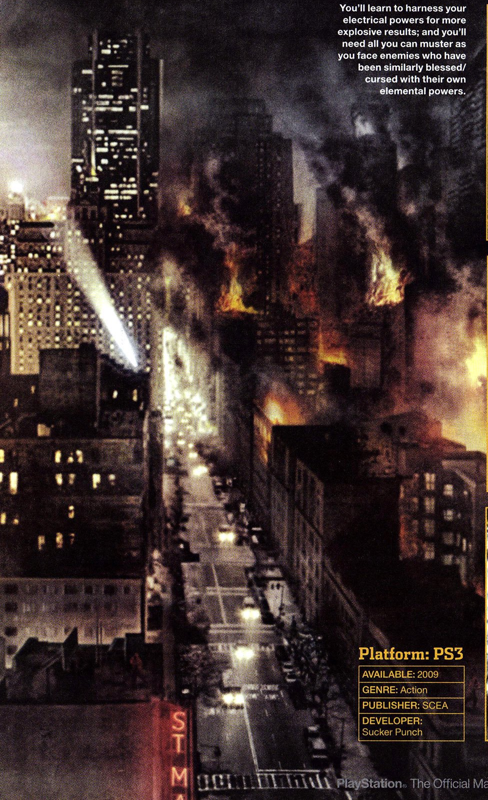


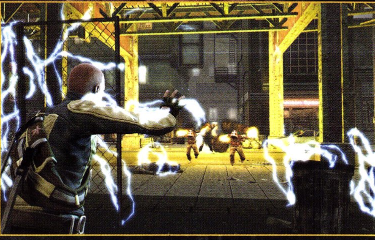


You'll learn to harness your electrical powers for more explosive results; and you'll need all you can muster as you face enemies who have been similarly blessed/cursed with their own elemental powers.









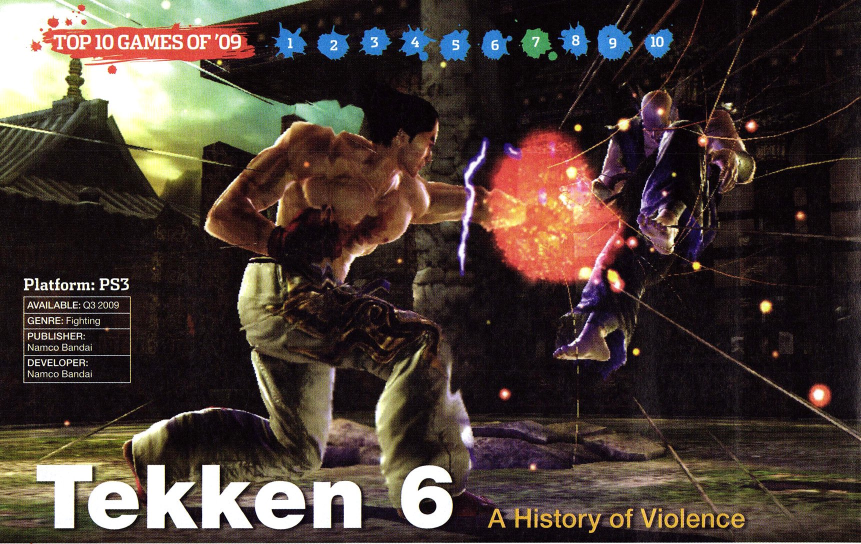
Platform: PS3

AVAILABLE: 2009

GENRE: Action

PUBLISHER: SCEA

DEVELOPER: Sucker Punch



Platform: PS3

AVAILABLE: Q3 2009
GENRE: Fighting
PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai
DEVELOPER: Namco Bandai

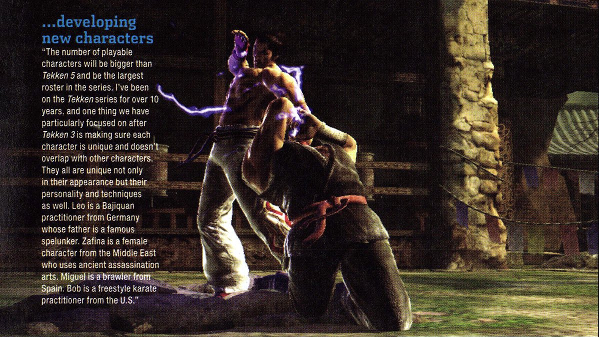
Tekken 6

A History of Violence

Certain franchises are inexorably linked to the history of the PlayStation platform. Franchises like *Final Fantasy, Metal Gear Solid,* and *God of War* that represent the pinnacle of their respective genres and the true potential of console gaming. *Tekken* deserves its place alongside those heavyweights. Though the series began life as (and continues to be) an arcade stalwart, it truly clinched its place in the annals of gaming greatness with the PlayStation version of *Tekken 3,* which, more than a decade later, is still widely considered one of the finest fighting games of all time.

Last November, Namco unleashed the sixth King of the Iron Fist Tournament in Japanese arcades...much to the chagrin of gamers here in the U.S. But one year later, Namco is finally revealing the details of a console-based version—the first *Tekken* built for the PS3. Building on the fan-favorite features of *Tekken 5* and the rebalanced content of *Tekken 6* arcade update *Bloodline Rebellion,* the console version of *Tekken 6* seems, in many ways, to be the most ambitious title in the franchise's history.

We were fortunate enough to speak with longtime *Tekken* developer and Executive Producer of *Tekken 6* **Katsuhiro Harada** to discuss, well, anything he was willing to tell us. Here's what he had to say about...



...developing new characters

"The number of playable characters will be bigger than *Tekken 5* and be the largest roster in the series. I've been on the *Tekken* series for over 10 years, and one thing we have particularly focused on after *Tekken 3* is making sure each character is unique and doesn't overlap with other characters. They all are unique not only in their appearance but their personality and techniques as well. Leo is a Bajiquan practitioner from Germany whose father is a famous spelunker. Zafina is a female character from the Middle East who uses ancient assassination arts. Miguel is a brawler from Spain. Bob is a freestyle karate practitioner from the U.S."

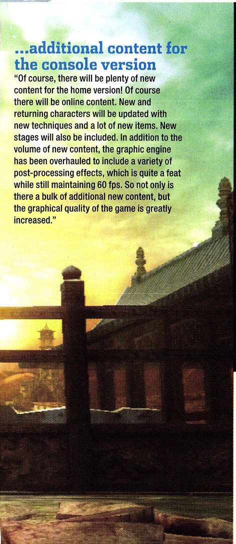
...balancing a fighting game with such a large roster

"[Balancing the game is] really a collaborative effort. We have a large staff in our office that plays the game. Also, there are a lot of *Tekken* players outside the company who provide feedback, take part in the project, and help balance the game. There are a lot of characters and a lot of fan requests that differ throughout the world, so it is quite a difficult task."

Rule the World with an Iron Fist

In addition to divulging details about *Tekken 6's* gameplay, Harada gave us the official lowdown on the next chapter in the twisted tale of the Mishima family. Who was the canon winner of the *Tekken 5* tournament? You're about to find out.

"The various mysteries surrounding the King of Iron Fist Tournament 5 came to an end when Jin Kazama defeated Jinpachi Mishima to win the tournament. After assuming control of the Mishima Zaibatsu, Jin commanded the elite units of the Tekken Force to conduct covert operations. The masses became paranoid and petty incidents soon led to open conflict as riots and civil strife increased. Governments began to lose power as the strife encompassed the globe. The Mishima Zaibatsu, declaring its independence, unleashed its might and declared war on the world. The Mishima Zaibatsu continued to expand their control over the globe until the G Corporation appeared as the only force that could oppose them. Rising up against the Mishima Zaibatsu in various regions, the G Corporation was viewed as a savior and had the passionate support of the people. Realizing that Jin Kazama is the root of the evil, G Corporation offers a significant bounty to anyone who can capture him alive. Almost as in reaction to the offer, the King of Iron Fist Tournament 6 was announced."



...additional content for the console version

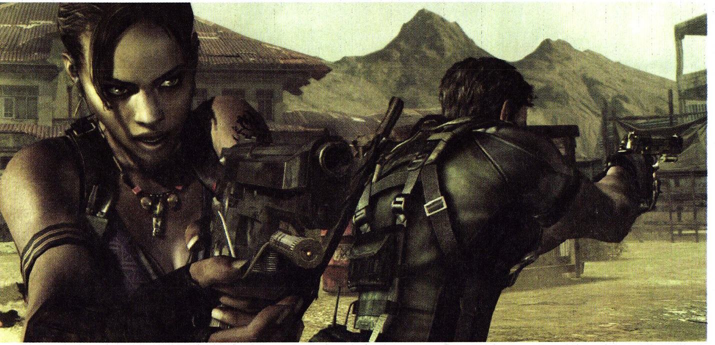
"Of course, there will be plenty of new content for the home version! Of course there will be online content. New and returning characters will be updated with new techniques and a lot of new items. New stages will also be included. In addition to the volume of new content, the graphic engine has been overhauled to include a variety of post-processing effects, which is quite a feat while still maintaining 60 fps. So not only is there a bulk of additional new content, but the graphical quality of the game is greatly increased."

...level design and customization options relative to Tekken 5

"There will be over 15 stages available from the Stage Select screen. However, there will also be hidden stages as well as CPU character stages. Of course, there are still infinite stages and stages with walls, like in *Tekken 5*. Compared to *Tekken 5*, not only are there more customizable parts, the customization feature itself has been greatly improved. In *Tekken 6*, bare models were created and the clothes were then layered on top to create the costume. As a result the upper and lower portions of the costume can be interchanged, providing greater freedom in customization. Also, technique items, while not affecting game balance, will allow players to taunt or otherwise showboat with flashy and unique moves."

...the influence of fans on the development of Tekken 6

"We are always listening to our fan base. The *Tekken* series has sold over 33 million copies worldwide so we receive a lot of feedback from our fans. The opinions differ greatly from region to region so we always have a hard time implementing every single feedback received. Sometimes we try to find the common denominator, other times we will address a specific request. It's quite difficult to find the best balance. However, we do and will continue to listen to our fans' requests as we make the game. Of course there will be online versus play, but there are also other ideas for network gameplay that we are considering. Also, we're interested in Home for the PlayStation 3 and are exploring some ideas from various angles."



Sheva has Chris's back in most combat situations, which is handy when the virus-riddled zombies swarm your every position.

Resident Evil 5

Hands-on with Co-op

It takes two to defeat the horde

Right from the outset, Capcom's *Resident Evil 5* made a statement; several, in fact, if you want to include the controversy surrounding the initial showcase of zombies in Africa. But the proof is in the playing, and this next-gen version is a no-brainer, no doubt member of the "most anticipated" club. Why? We played it. And we can tell.

While the single-player game focuses on Chris Redfield's story, the co-op lets a buddy take Sheva's role. Picking a control scheme is an initial hurdle. For some inexplicable reason, some people prefer *RE's* "traditional" control method, but fortunately, Capcom has acquiesced on comments and complaints from the broader audience to provide an option more familiar to *Call of Duty* players, for example. Armed with a system that doesn't hinder your ability to target marauding virus-fueled enemies quickly, you'll stand a modicum of a chance, even alongside a partner.

In order to retain the horror chills, as well as the visceral thrills, your cooperative encounters will split up Chris and Sheva, and throw enemies at you from all angles, requiring quick-thinking communication and sit-reps to get a handle on the threat and next steps. In our playtest, one simple example was a set scene where Chris provides the flip for Sheva to jump across a gap, whereupon enemies assault her from all sides. Though at a distance, and maybe feeling left out of the close-at-hand combat, Chris can pick off enemies (targeting those ubiquitous exploding barrels for a more satisfying room clearing), and ease Sheva's way to a chained door, which she in turn breaks to let the two heroes meet up for the next challenge.

In the final encounter against the executioner boss, teamwork turned out to be more vital than we realized. Fighting your own fight against the various zombies can easily detract attention from the main hooded, chainsaw-wielding threat. The two characters can trade ammo among each other, usually precipitated by a "no, don't take that, I need more ammo" followed by a "well, I need it too" over the headset. This forces dramatic cooperative moments and shared intelligence on the ground, as became clear as one of us realized the trick to taking down the Executioner, and needed to clue our partner in fast.

Throughout all the experience the visual fidelity of the setting was suitably ominous without resorting to typical darkened corridors. The sun can still shine, but the zombie threat is still so real and present, so be sure you bring a close personal friend.

Platform: PS3

AVAILABLE: March 2009
GENRE: Survival Horror
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom

"Armed with a system that doesn't hinder your ability to target marauding virus-fueled enemies quickly, you'll stand a modicum of a chance, even alongside a partner."

That hooded executioner's axe is as deadly as it looks. You'll need teamwork to target it, and then hit it where it hurts.

Zombies with chainsaws? Now that ain't fair. These fellas aren't going to take their extermination lying down.

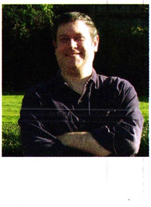
Operation Flashpoint 2: Dragon Rising

Let your plans be dark and as impenetrable as night

Platform: PS3

AVAILABLE: 2009	
GENRE:	Military Shooter
PUBLISHER:	Codemasters
DEVELOPER:	Codemasters Studios

While we love strapping on combat gear, military-themed shooters are seemingly a dime-a-*Dirty-Dozen* these days. It takes something special to stand out from the ranks, and somewhat surprisingly it's *Operation Flashpoint 2: Dragon Rising* (a follow-up to a critically-respected but often overlooked PC game from 2001) that looks to have the firepower to mount a major genre offensive. *OF2* has been our radar since this past E3, where it left us shell shocked with its superb graphic presentation (even in a relatively early build) and its focus on recreating a realistic modern battlefield experience. Run-and-gunners may want to look elsewhere, but *OF2* looks to have the air of authenticity that military-philes will covet.



Keepin' it real

Lee Brimmicombe-Wood, Chief Games Designer takes us into the Codemasters Studio war room and briefs us on why *Operation Flashpoint 2* will dominate the battlefield.

PTOM: Realism seems to be a key development goal for *Operation Flashpoint 2: Dragon Rising,* but realism can run the gamut from authentic and satisfying to boring, and even disturbing. How do you balance realism within the parameters of an entertaining gaming experience?

"If you run out of clips because you've been spamming the battlefield with pent up nerd-rage, you better get a spare from a member of your fireteam or start writing your obituary."

LEE BRIMMICOMBE-WOOD: On *Operation Flashpoint 2* we've really thrown our efforts into the under-the-hood combat modeling: into the ballistics, ammunition performance, trajectories, weapon modeling, armor characteristics.

This should lead to an experience different from what you might find in other shooters where they cut these corners. Our tanks don't have health bars to wear down—either a round penetrates the armor or it doesn't, and we assess the combat results accordingly based on the type of munitions being used. Shells not only cause blast damage to targets nearby, but also project fragments at targets further away based on real-world physics.

Modern combat games seem outnumbered by WWII-themed games lately. What are the similarities and differences between the two combat eras, and how does that translate to the battlefield experience in *OF2?*

One of the major differences is the increase in infantry firepower on the modern battlefield. The WWII Leatherneck might have had BAR gunners and a few Thompson sub-machineguns in his squad, but the majority of the men were armed with semi-automatic rifles. By contrast, every modern Marine carries an automatic rifle or carbine. The ability to achieve strategic dominance in a firefight is much greater.

We reflect this in *OF2* through our suppression mechanic. If you project enough fire in the direction of the enemy, even if you don't hit them you will force them to take cover, to slacken fire, to lose morale. If you don't break their morale and force them to withdraw through the weight of firepower alone, you can suppress them long enough to close and kill at close quarters. In principle, these tactics are little different from those our forefathers used in WWII, but modern firepower makes for a much more accelerated form of fighting.

Another great difference is infantry protection. Quite simply, modern body armor is outstanding. Other than his steel helmet, your WWII Marine had no protection at all. One bullet and he bought the farm. His modern counterpart can shake off a hit on his chest armor with little more than bruises. Which is not to say the proverbial bullet with your name on cannot take you down with one shot, but the modern Marine is more likely to live if hit in a protected area. In *OF2* this is where realism makes for better gaming. A headshot or limb hit will take you down. But if an enemy hits you in the center of mass, where your protection is, you stand a good chance of survival.

One of the highlights in the *OF2* game description is "Fully loaded weapons and individual ammunition types will be simulated with detailed ballistic physics." That sounds awesome, but what does that actually mean in terms of gameplay?

What it means is that you must choose the right tool for the job and be sure to make every shot count. For example, for one specific weapon, the player could load ball, full metal jacket, hollow-point, or sub-sonic rounds depending on the weapon configuration.

Each bullet type has different properties so while one may penetrate armor more effectively, another might better suit the current situation. We've even got snipers equipped with hand-loaded hollow-points for those lethal headshots. (Tip of the hat to those campers out there…)

The important point is that you've only got so many rounds in a clip, so don't waste them! If you're firing in burst mode at long range, expect to miss your target and run out of ammo pretty quickly. If you run out of clips because you've been spamming the battlefield with pent up nerd-rage, you better get a spare from a member of your fireteam or start writing your obituary.

Give one surprising fact about the combat experience, or a weapons system found in *OF2*—something contrary to any pre-conceived or popular notion we might have.

In the movies and other games, fragmentation grenades are treated like miniature nukes: They rip people to pieces and knock down swathes of the enemy. When reality strikes like a brick wrapped in a slice of lemon, grenades aren't that deadly. They are more likely to initially maim than kill. Indeed, injuries are sometimes preferable than a real kill on the battlefield because they tie up enemy manpower in trying to save the injured man's life.

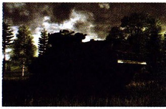
In *OF2,* you'll find that grenades are less lethal than you are used to in other games. That said, don't be complacent! They will still spray you and your team with deadly shrapnel. Remember, a wound in an unprotected body part is probably more likely to be deadly to you and your fireteam than getting hit in your armor. Spray some shrapnel in an area and watch the opposition fade away over the next 30 seconds or so as they succumb to secondary wounds.

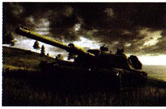
Skira, the island where the conflict in *OF2* occurs, measures over 30,000 square miles. That sounds huge, but is it really when there are whole armies running around? How does that size come to play—are there going to be long bits of cross-country navigation or are combat units going to be bumping into each other?

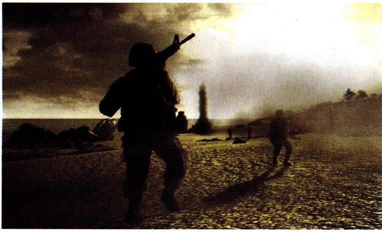
Skira is a huge island. That said, at its narrowest it's only a few miles across. While there may be a lot of terrain, the lay of the land naturally funnels the armies towards each other. Natural valleys, villages, bridges, and lakes force strategic confrontation between forces—where the army spearheads will converge and clash.

In the game, the player will be able to go anywhere. He can try to march to the far end of the island if he wishes. Of course, he will probably fail his mission objectives if he tries that and he will also encounter plenty of enemies who will try to kill him along the way. That said, the player may choose to navigate his own way, picking his way past patrols, pickets, and strongpoints as he feels is most strategic, perhaps skipping one mission objective to hit another more quickly.

Just like being in a real war, being a soldier in *OF2* combines periods of sheer terror as contacts with the enemy are made and firefights kick off, with the importance of seeking strategic advantage in a firefight. Terrain, trees, foliage rocks, etc., all play essential roles in the player using the environment to maximum advantage, to stay alive to fight another day.







Heavy Rain

Platform: PS3

AVAILABLE: 2009	
GENRE:	Adventure
PUBLISHER:	SCEA
DEVELOPER:	Quantic Dreams

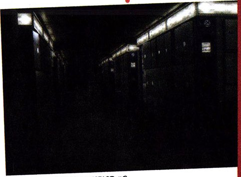
More access = more questions

SCENES

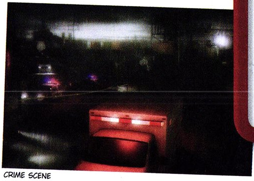
It's a mystery to us. The game, we believe, is a murder mystery (an assumption drawn from its subtitle: *The Origami Killer).* The actual story? A mystery. The characters? Total mystery. You get the drift? And despite the few scant details of who you'll play and what you'll do in Quantic Dreams' story-driven opus, *Heavy Rain* is clearly one of the PlayStation 3's defining titles in 2009. This, we believe, is the game you'll tell all your friends about...and your parents... and illustrate the breadth of gameplay potential available on PlayStation 3. Where PSN games sit on the simple, accessible end of the gaming spectrum, *Heavy Rain* will take its place as the adult-themed, stylish, emotionally driven adventure that proves videogames are capable of more than just alien slaughter!

So like piecing together the evidence from a crime scene, here's our whiteboard collecting the facts we've gleaned in our early investigations.

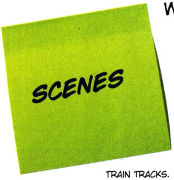
SCENES



LEXINGTON STATION: INTERIOR #2

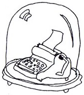


CRIME SCENE

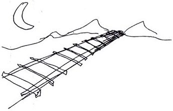


WHAT WE SAW:

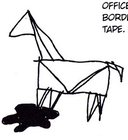
MANFRED'S ANTIQUES: AN ANTIQUE SHOP WITH STYLIZED TYPEWRITERS IN GLASS CASES.



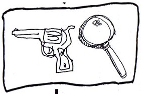
LEXINGTON STATION: A TRAIN STATION, AND SCENE OF... WE'RE NOT SURE, BUT THE ESCALATORS MUST LEAD TO PLATFORMS DOWNSTAIRS. MUST...RIGHT? (SEE PHOTO)



TRAIN TRACKS. NIGHTTIME. POURING HEAVY RAIN. POLICE OFFICERS STANDING GUARD OVER A CRIME SCENE, BORDERED BY A CHAIN LINK FENCE AND YELLOW-STRIPED TAPE. AN AMBULANCE. FLASHING LIGHTS.



WAS A BLOODIED ORIGAMI FIGURINE OF AN ANIMAL FOUND AT THE SCENE? WHICH ANIMAL? WHAT DOES IT MEAN?



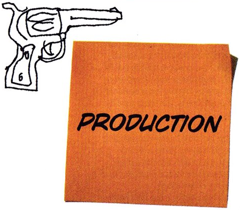
WHAT IS YOUR ROLE? INVESTIGATOR OR PERPETRATOR?

ARE YOU VIEWING THE SCENE AS THE VICTIM?

IF YOU'RE INVESTIGATING, ARE YOU A COP? INTERESTED PARTY? WHAT WILL YOU HEAR?

"EVERY SINGLE DETAIL TELLS A CONSISTENT MESSAGE, AND 'MAINTAINING THIS CONSISTENCY' IS MY ROLE AS DIRECTOR OF THE EXPERIENCE,"
DAVID CAGE, WRITER, DIRECTOR

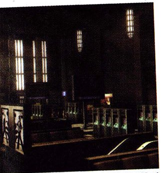
"USE CUTSCENES WHEN THERE REALLY IS NO OTHER POSSIBILITY."



- 20,000 PAGES OF SCRIPT
- 170 DAYS OF MOTION-CAPTURE SHOOTING
- 70-PLUS ACTORS AND STUNTMEN
- 30,000 UNIQUE ANIMATIONS
- 3 YEARS PRODUCTION
- 220 DEVELOPMENT PEOPLE (IN ADDITION TO THE 70-PLUS ACTORS)

"I DIDN'T WANT ANYONE IN OUTSOURCING TO THINK OR MAKE DECISIONS...SO FOR EVERY OBJECT IN EVERY SCENE THERE WAS A PHOTO REFERENCE ATTACHED,"
DAVID CAGE

THE BIGGEST OUTSOURCING PROJECT EVER!


LEXINGTON STATION INTERIOR #1

THE HOUSE, BEFORE: EXTERIOR

THE HOUSE, BEFORE: INTERIOR

ACTORS

"WE SPENT A YEAR, TO BE HONEST, ON CASTING."

WHY NOT TOM CRUISE? "REALLY, IT'S NOT THE MONEY...WHEN WE THOUGHT ABOUT IT, WE COULD HAVE TOM CRUISE IN *HEAVY RAIN*, AND THAT WOULD BE GREAT FOR MARKETING... BUT THROUGH THAT MARKETING, PEOPLE WOULD SAY "OH, THEY GOT TOM CRUISE BECAUSE THE GAME IS NOT SO GOOD." BUT ACTUALLY, WHEN YOU PAY TOM CRUISE, YOU PAY A LOT OF MONEY AND YOU GET, AT MOST, A WEEK. WITH AURELIE AND OTHERS, WE GOT THEM FOR A YEAR."

A 3D SCANNER WAS ASSEMBLED IN PUBLIC PLACES AROUND PARIS, AND VARIOUS PASSERS-BY OF ALL AGES AND ETHNICITIES WERE ASKED TO POSE. "IF WE USE THEM, WE GIVE THEM A LITTLE MONEY, AND THEY'RE IN THE GAME."

MOTIVATION

"TO TELL A STORY THAT MEANS SOMETHING... NOT THE BATTLE OF GOOD AND EVIL, BUT THAT TALKS TO YOU AS A HUMAN BEING,"
DAVID CAGE

"IT'S NOT A GAME WHERE YOU SHOOT, OR DRIVE, OR JUMP, BUT A GAME WHERE YOU MAKE DECISIONS,"
DAVID CAGE

ORIGAMI?

- *ORIGAMI BUTTERFLY*
- *ORIGAMI RAT*
- *ORIGAMI BEAR*

SCENE TITLES BUT WHAT DO THEY MEAN?

- *IN THE LAKE*
- *KILLER'S MOTHER*
- *FACE TO FACE*

SURPRISE!

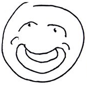
"WE LOOK FOR VERY SIGNIFICANT MORAL CHOICES THAT WILL QUESTION THE PLAYER AS AN INDIVIDUAL...I REALLY WANT TO QUESTION WHAT YOU WOULD DO IF IT WAS HAPPENING TO YOU."

"THE PLAYER SHOULD BE SURPRISED AND NEVER KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT NEXT."

FEAR...

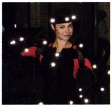
"WE'RE TRYING TO CREATE MOMENTS THAT LEAVE AN IMPRINT IN PLAYERS' MINDS... THERE WERE SCENES WHERE SOMETIMES WE WERE IN A STATE OF SHOCK DURING FILMING, BASED ON WHAT WE WERE SEEING..."

EMOTION



HAPPY

"WE'RE CREATING AN EXPERIENCE OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF EMOTIONS, NOT JUST FEAR...BUT MAKE PEOPLE LAUGH, OR FEEL HAPPY. WHAT PEOPLE REMEMBER WHEN THEY TURN OFF THE CONSOLE IS HOW THEY FELT."
DAVID CAGE



CAPTURE YOUR 'MOTIONS

- Qore host Veronica Belmont donned the tight, light-bobbled suit required by the motion capture team to create a digital event around a police officer coming to visit, then either taking a bullet or hauling his target against a wall, throwing them on a table, and slapping on the handcuffs.

- 28 cameras are typically in place to capture this detail, in a studio on the ground floor of QDs' studio that's genuinely locked by a fingerprint-recognition locking system.

GAMETRAILERS TV'S Daniel Kayser bravely volunteered for police duty, which seemed like the short straw, being mo-cap—capped by Veronica, until the "alternate" version had him apprehending the gun-toting host before she could get her shot off. Oscar nominations all round?

bonus track

EAT LEAD: THE RETURN OF MATT HAZARD

A fireside chat with gaming's most fictional hero

Before home consoles, before Duke Nukem, before New Coke…there was Hazard. Matt Hazard. The single gruffest, most water-resistant character ever to sucker-punch a videogame. Those dead pixels on your screen? They're not broken. Matt Hazard killed 'em. Time, it seems, has conveniently forgotten him, but now Marathon Software is bringing him out of retirement in what can truly be considered the single most epic franchise revival of our generation. We've scored an exclusive excerpt from the forthcoming "Behind The Game" special featuring the man himself, courtesy of D3 Publisher and Vicious Cycle.

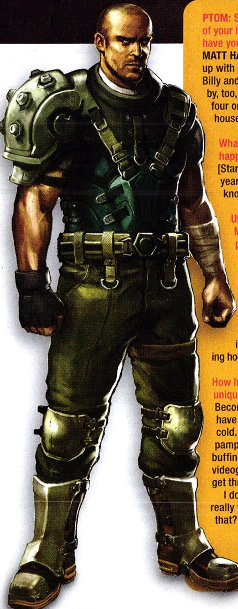
Platform: PS3

AVAILABLE: Q1 2009

GENRE: Third-person Shooter

PUBLISHER: D3 Publisher

DEVELOPER: Vicious Cycle



PTOM: So Matt…er, Mr. Hazard, it's been six years since the release of your last title, the ill-fated *Choking Hazard: Candy Gramm*. What have you been up to for all these years?

MATT HAZARD: Mostly investing in virtual real estate but I do meet up with some other guys in the Retired Heroes Union. You know like Billy and Jimmy Lee, Strider, Haggar. Ryu and Ken used to come by, too, but they've gotten all busy lately. We have lunch together four or five times a week at this Arby's down the street from my house. Man, the curly fries are amazing there.

What made you decide to try for a comeback, and now that it's happening, how do you feel?

[Starts beat boxing] Don't call it a comeback. I've been here for years. Rockin' my peers and putting suckas in fear. Hazard says knock you out. [Smiles and folds his arms] And I will…

Uh…yes. Right, so Wallace Wellesley, current Marathon-Megasoft CEO, seems to have played a pretty major role in pulling you out of retirement. Tell us about your relationship with Mr. Wellesley and what you think the future might hold for the two of you.

Honestly, I've never met the suit. He bought Marathon Software and is letting me teach all the new generation of gamers what gaming is all about, so I am happy to have my chance. Although his Armani outfits and his snide grin gives me an uneasy feeling, I expect he's like all other gaming industry types I've known in the last 25 years—too busy buying hookers and blow with all the dollars I'm making for him.

How have you prepared for your return? Doing anything new or unique in *Eat Lead?*

Becoming next-gen is tougher than I imagined. Millions of dollars have been spent to polish me up…and those tools are freakin' cold. Imagine it all as a day at the spa, but instead of being pampered, they make it excruciating by poking and judging and buffing to get rid of all my jagged edges. That is why most of these videogame heroes these days are real badasses, as it takes one to get through that transformation.

I do however have some pretty sweet cheats up my sleeve. I really wanna bring back Big Head mode. Whatever happened to that? Nobody wants to play in Big Head mode anymore.

It's a shame too. Heads simply aren't big enough these days. So what else can you tell us about your upcoming adventure?

Man there's a lot of different colors in this game and everything looks so…un-jaggedy! I still remember when my arms were made up of the same rectangles as my legs. And the music, I used to have to create my own music for the game in my spare time using a synthesizer but today, WOW!

What ever happened to your partnership with Dexter Dare, who appeared alongside you in games like the *Matt and Dexter* and *Murder Force?* Any chance we'll see him in *Eat Lead?*

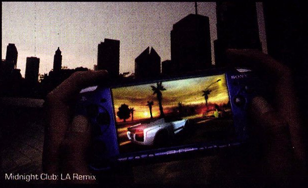
Dex started hittin' the mana potions pretty hard a few years back. He might make an appearance (Matt rolls his eyes) but he's not the spunky d-bag I used to call my wingman. I think it's all a little bit of the green-eyed monster if you know what I mean.

Your career has been riddled with controversy. The Steamy Coffee scandal, your very public feud with BJ Blazkowicz, the Lara Croft defamation suit, even allegations from fans that you "sold out" following the release of your most recent titles. How do you handle the pressure, and do you have any comments for your critics?

I've been working a lot with my therapist and yoga instructor to get through the stress of being in the public eye.

Of all the weird personality flaws in Wally, I am glad to see a company that sees my strengths and not just my legendary name to use for their wild and absurd marketing/licensing schemes. I do shooters damn it, and you will see me in all my glory again…not *that* glory, get your mind out of the gutter.

▶Be sure to catch Matt's fourth-wall-breaking, franchise-fabricating third-person shooter *Eat Lead* when it explodes onto shelves next year. You know, assuming you figure out what the hell you just read.


Midnight Club: LA Remix

Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

LEGO Batman: The Video Game

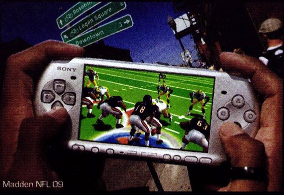
Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee® 2

FIFA 09

Resistance: Retribution™

Ben 10: Alien Force

Ratchet & Clank®: Size Matters


Madden NFL 09

BUZZ!™ Master Quiz

PINK'S
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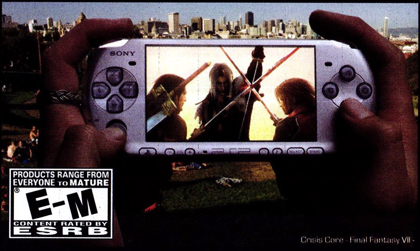
Crisis Core - Final Fantasy VII -

PRODUCTS RANGE FROM EVERYONE TO MATURE
E-M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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PlayStation Portable

PLAYSTATION Network

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Enter the realm of the initiated

PS3 SECRETS REVEALED!

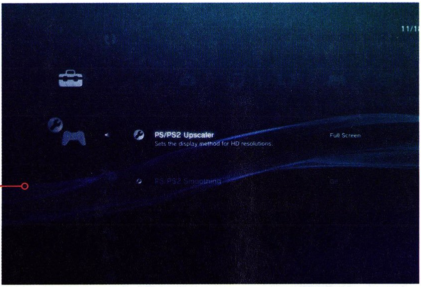
Deep within its menu system, the PS3 holds the key to multiple features that are often overlooked and just plain cool. Want to get more from your console? Check out these top tips and unleash some incredible power.

Settings: Don't Be Afraid!

Remember, any setting you change can always be changed back! Okay, so that's hardly an original thought, but really, it's very tough to actually break your PS3's innards short of dropping it on a hard surface. The software is pretty robust, so tootle around in the menus to make sure you're set for maximum opportunity, whatever your setup. You'll find all these under the Settings tab on the XMB.

Game Settings>PS Upscaler

Some PSone and PS2 games can be "upscaled," meaning that the graphics output for standard definition games (output in, say, traditional 480i) can be boosted to HD levels (1080p, 1080i, 720p). Of course, this only works if your PS3 actually supports backwards compatibility. Some games upscaled in this way will just look plain weird, so you can turn the upscaling off in those cases. You can also select a Full Screen option that will stretch the image to fill your big, widescreen TV. This can also cause your PSone and PS2 games to look uncomfortably odd, so try it and see for yourself.



11/1

PS/PS2 Upscaler — Full Screen

Sets the display method for HD resolutions.

PS/PS2 Smoothing — Off

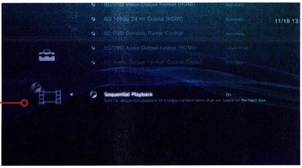
Depending on your results with various PSOne and PS2 games you can sdjust the Upscaling between Normal and Full Screen, so be sure to tweak this setting if your game looks weird.

Video Settings>BD/DVD Upscaler

Standard definition video files can get a resolution boost if you turn on this option. The Double Scale option will boost standard definition playback if your TV supports 1080i or 1080p resolution. The Normal setting will match your TV size dimensions for playback, while Full Screen can make some video playback look wonky.

Video Settings>Sequential Playback

This one's great to set if you have, say, several episodes of a TV show and you're camped on the couch ready for a marathon. So those *Family Guy* episodes on a USB flash drive (or copied to the PS3 hard disk) can keep on streaming (saving you the heady task of playing each one individually).



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BD/DVD Video Output Format (HDMI)

BD 1080p 24 Hz Output (HDMI)

BD/DVD Dynamic Range Control

BD/DVD Audio Output Format (HDMI)

BD Audio Output Format (Optical Digital)

Sequential Playback — On

Sets for sequential playback of multiple content items that are saved on the hard disk.

With a series of videos queued, this option ensures that you don't need to head back to the XMB to start each new showing.

Music Settings>Audio CD Output Frequency

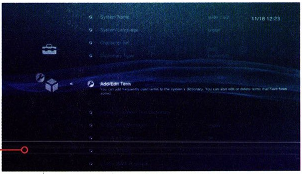
Ripping CDs to your PS3 hard disk is handy for several reasons, and this setting lets you upgrade the output quality to taste. 44.1, 88.2, and 176.4 kHz are the bit rate options to make those Britney songs sound so much sweeter.

Music Settings>Crossfade Playback

So you've ripped a kickin' soundtrack for the party you're about to host, but the playback jars in awkward silent moments that your guests need to fill with actual conversation. Avoid such annoyances by ensuring not a nanosecond of silence with the crossfade functionality. You can set it from one to ten seconds, so as one track finishes, the next will already be playing… Beautiful!

System Settings>Add/Edit Term

Predictive text is flashy and incredibly useful if you don't have a USB keyboard plugged in your PS3 and still want to text friends. If you use words that might not appear in Merriam-Webster's multi-page tome, you can add them here so that you can access them quickly.



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System Name

System Language

Character Set

Dictionary Type

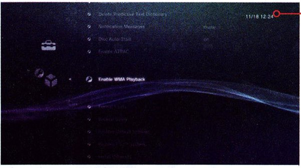
Add/Edit Term

You can add frequently used terms to the system's dictionary. You can also edit or delete terms that have been added.

Building out your own personal dictionary will help save time when you're trying to type quickly to a friend mid-match.

System Settings>Enable WMA Settings

This might look like a throwaway, but the option to enable content formats like this ensures the owners of that format are paid their license fee. When you enable the WMA setting, the activation pings Sony so that they pay the license holders that one of their users (you) needed that function. It's a method of limiting cost based on how many users actually do take advantage of a feature. Licenses, rights, ownership—it's a difficult path to navigate for SCEA, but just one click for you.



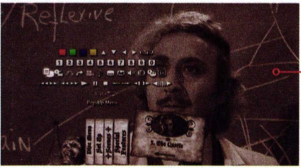
Handy if you're streaming videos from a media server...

Downloading movies

You've bought a movie rental; you're downloading; you pause; the screen goes black, and to the XMB; how do you get back? If the movie is still downloading, go to the Download Manager, then press Triangle. Now you can play the movie (and if you were part way through it, it'll start where you left off).

Scene Search

A really useful feature in the playback controls (accessed while you're playing a video by pressing Triangle) is the Scene Search. You can access it directly using the Square button, or scroll to the icon on the top row, furthest to the left. Far better than a regular DVD or BD chapter search function, this shows a thumbnail of the action in whatever increment you set (15 seconds to 5 minutes). It's perfect for jumping to that one special scene you just have to watch time and time again. You know the one.

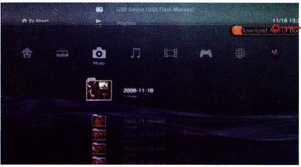


When you just have find your favorite scene...and replay it!

Did You Know?

Photo

Simple enough, but did you know that under the Photo tab, if you hit Square, it will change the view of the photos you have access to, grouping them by date, name, or showing them individually!



Order your photos by date, name, or show each individually.

Media Server

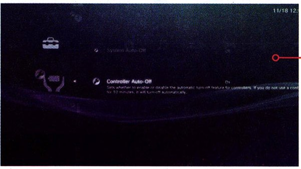
If you're getting choppy playback quality when streaming videos from a media server PC to your PS3, with the video file highlighted, hit Triangle and select Copy to copy the file onto your PS3.

PixelJunk Monsters

You can play it on your PSP using the Remote Play functionality. Connect your PSP remotely to the PS3, go to your *PixelJunk Monsters* game, and presto! Strategy puzzling on the go!

Power Save Settings

Under the Settings tab, in Power Save Settings, you can set your controller to automatically turn off after a set amount of time. It's a really handy feature that preserves battery life.



Get the most juice possible out of each controller charge.

Account Management

Tweaks in recent firmware updates have made it easier to redeem promotional codes and cards by just hitting the Account Management option under the PlayStation Network tab.

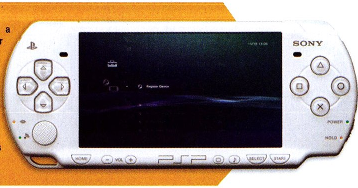
Remote Play

Oft-discussed, oft-overlooked, and oft-underestimated, pairing your PSP with your PS3 can open a wealth of opportunities we bet you never even considered.

Register your device. It's now a simple one-button click when your PSP is connected to your PS3 to have the handheld registered. You can also set Remote Start to On so that you can switch your PS3 on while you're on the road (and freak out the family who may wonder what ghost wants to play PS3 games).

Browse the Store. While the PSP has its own Store, once connected via Remote Play to your PS3, you can access the PS3 Store through the handheld. Through that, you can set a download going so it's ready when you get home, for example. Handy.

Media Server viewing. This one's a winner. If you use a PC as a media server to, say, view photos from your computer on your PS3, watch videos, or listen to music stored on the home PC, you can access that content on the PSP through Remote Play. The PSP will read the DLNA media protocol, allowing you to access the files. Though video files are likely to be very choppy over that connection, it's definitely a funky way to view photos when you're miles from home.



Rock Band's Five Most Unexpectedly Rockin' Downloadable Songs

With over 250 downloadable songs currently available for *Rock Band* (and *Rock Band 2*), finding the worthwhile tracks can be challenging. Naturally, personal taste will ultimately dictate most of your purchases, but here are a few gems that you might have overlooked.

1) Freezepop – Sprode

Freezepop may not carry the same kind of clout as some of *Rock Band's* other acts, but they've been churning out synth-pop jams for nearly a decade now and this remix of their delightfully danceable ode to their fans delivers one of the game's finest bass tracks and surprisingly addictive guitar and drum lines. Who would've thought that a song created entirely with synthesizers would translate so well into a game called *Rock Band?*

2) Fall Out Boy – This Ain't a Scene, It's an Arms Race

Whether you adore or despise the band, you can't deny that this song is particularly overplayed. But take our word for it: playing it in *Rock Band* is far more fun than just hearing it for the thousandth time. Every instrument track offers an enjoyable mix of technical work and straightforward rocking, and the vocals couldn't be catchier (despite the ~~god~~damn radio edit).

3) The Grateful Dead Track Pack

There's a good chance that even the most devoted Dead Head wouldn't describe Jerry Garcia's music as "rockin," yet every song in the Dead pack manages to be both pleasant and enjoyable. Each instrument track on all six songs admirably avoids fun-crushing repetition, and a few even stand out as truly fun and unique—like the drum track on "Casey Jones" and the guitar part in "China Cat Sunflower."

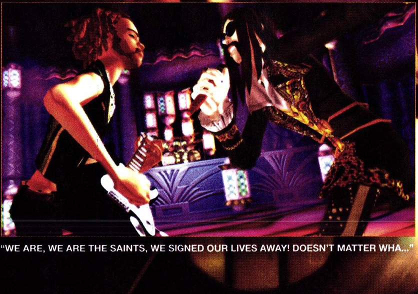
You can't tell, but these guys are playing "Last Train to Clarksville" right now and it's awesome!

4) The Monkees – Last Train to Clarksville

In the '60s—y'know, when the rest of the staff (except Teresa) was listening to their gramophones—these guys were a pop sensation. Nowadays, however, their dated sound comes off as, well, cheesy. But when you run this track through the Rock Band machine, it yields surprising results: intricate guitars, challenging drums, and fun-to-sing melodies that are well within most peoples' vocal range. Guaranteed to make you smile or no money back!

5) Mötley Crüe – Saints of Los Angeles

Band reunions rarely go well. Heavy metal band reunions, even less so. So imagine the world's surprise when the title track from the Crüe's new album is not only decent but, in fact, rocks pretty hard (especially when you get to pick up a plastic guitar and play it yourself). Everything is catchy, from the guitars to the drums, and the vocal chorus absolutely demands a sing-along. Röck!



"WE ARE, WE ARE THE SAINTS, WE SIGNED OUR LIVES AWAY! DOESN'T MATTER WHA..."

It's hard to be upset when you've got a bitchin' mustache like this guy, but clearly he's not happy about "El Scorcho."

Rock Band's Five Most Disappointingly Boring Downloadable Songs

Some songs—even those that rock in real life—simply aren't fun in an interactive setting. Here are a few stellar tracks that just don't work in *Rock Band*. Even fans of the bands are better off leaving these songs unsung.

1) Weezer – El Scorcho

The hit single off of Weezer's seminal second album Pinkerton, this song is catchy, quirky, and irrefutably great, but it simply isn't cut out for *Rock Band*. With nauseatingly repetitive guitar and drum parts—which are made artificially complex on the Hard and Expert settings—and a bass line that only, well, exists for half the song, it's impossible to escape this track un-bored. Plus, this is actually not the version that appears on the album (note the entirely changed guitar solo and contrived bass line), so even hardcore Weezer fans will be disappointed. Say it ain't so!

2) Nine Inch Nails – Burn

First of all, unless your name is Trent Reznor, good luck trying to sing like Trent Reznor. But vocal intensity aside, this track—despite being almost cathartic to listen to—is the definition of repetitive. Nothing draws attention to the fact that a song doesn't change for the first two and half minutes like holding a guitar, waiting to play. The only redeeming quality here is the interesting drumbeat, but again, it's too repetitive to be fun.

3) The Pixies – Debaser

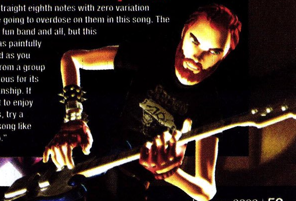
The Pixies, while not necessarily the most famous band, have had an undeniable impact on alternative music. So it only makes sense that the most infectious track from their most influential album, Doolittle, would be at least entertaining, right? Well, unfortunately, "Debaser" is deceptively simple and straightforward, meaning that every instrument ends up being a chore to play even on Expert. So despite seeming like a perfect choice for the game, the energy of this song is somehow lost in translation. Terrible? No. Disappointing? Definitely.

4) Avenged Sevenfold – Critical Acclaim

Oh, hey, Avenged Sevenfold! Time for a good-old shred fest, right? Sadly, no. This is, quite frankly, a baffling song choice since it isn't particularly technical or interesting on a musical level and it's entirely broken up with strange talking segments that are the equivalent of a black hole for fun. The song contains one cool guitar solo and an intense (albeit physically painful) drum part, but in the end, it just doesn't live up to *Rock Band's* other metal tracks.

5) The Ramones – Rockaway Beach

Hope you like straight eighth notes with zero variation because you're going to overdose on them in this song. The Ramones are a fun band and all, but this track is about as painfully straightforward as you would expect from a group that was notorious for its lack of musicianship. If you really want to enjoy some Ramones, try a better-known song like "Blitzkrieg Bop."



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news for gamers

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Reviews

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RATINGS

★★★★★ **LEGENDARY**
A game so amazing, the entire PTOM staff recommends it. A must buy!

★★★★½ **SUPERB**
Not quite a timeless classic, but one of the finest of its breed.

★★★★ **GREAT!**
A finely crafted, thoroughly enjoyable experience. Worth your time and money.

★★★½ **SOLID**
A strong game. We noticed some flaws, but there's more to like than loathe.

★★★ **ENJOYABLE**
If the topic/license/style is your thing, there's enough to keep you entertained.

★★½ **MEDIOCRE**
An equal blend of sweet and sour. Discerning gamers can find better.

★★ **SCARRED**
A smattering of entertainment hidden amongst an abundance of flaws.

★½ **FRUSTRATING**
"Argh!" will be the self-created soundtrack of this game. No thank you.

★ **PAINFUL**
We played it so you don't have to. Now you owe us cookies.

½ **BROKEN**
Hey, it comes in a free plastic box! Wee!

Which aliens are on your hot and hate lists? Email us at PTOM_Letters@futureus.com to let us know! (You might just get some junk from Rob's desk in return.) Label your email "Alien Invasion!" to qualify!

Hot 5 List Top Picks from the Last Five Issues

1) **Prince of Persia** p 66

2) **LittleBigPlanet** | PS3 | Holiday 08 ★★★★★
3) **Valkyria Chronicles** | PS3 | Dec 08 ★★★★½
4) **BioShock** | PS3 | Nov 08 ★★★★★
5) **Soulcalibur IV** | PS3 | Oct 08 ★★★★½

Meet the experts delivering your buying advice

This month, the PTOM team waxes on about the songs they wish were in *Guitar Hero: World Tour*.

ROB SMITH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Rob dropped in from an excursion to *Wayne's World* to deliver his selection: Anything by Queen. Too much keyboard for "Bohemian Rhapsody" to work, but how about "Seven Seas of Rye" or "We Will Rock You," "Who Wants To Live Forever" or the classic stadium anthem "We Are The Champions?" Brilliant. Oh what we would pay to see Rob perform in Freddy Mercury-esque attire.

NOW PLAYING: *Resistance 2, Killzone 2, LittleBigPlanet, FIFA 09*

TERESA DUN
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Teresa would pick a sweet, cheery medley of all the chocobo theme songs. Mambo de Chocobo, Techno de Chocobo, Cinco de Chocobo, and the rest. Only problem is, she'd probably toss away her guitar/bass/drumsticks in the middle of it, stand up, and flap her arms/jut her chin ("that's how chocobos dance!") singing "DO, do do do do do do, DO, do DO!"

NOW PLAYING: *Call of Duty: World at War, Fallout 3, Guitar Hero: World Tour*

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

Displaying his impeccable cultural tastes once again, Ken makes the eclectic selection of Miles Davis' "Bitches Brew" as his *GH:WT* song. Of course, this will force developer Neversoft to develop a note chart for trumpet, and a trumpet peripheral too, but that's not asking too much is it? After all, is there anything that really matters more than enriching our lives through Art? So you go, Ken—keep rockin' out on cool jazz.

NOW PLAYING: *FIFA 09, Four Free,* and more real-life soccer!

GARY STEINMAN
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Gary loves music but has no interest in any music game that doesn't star a 2D rapping dog or a chirpy vector line drawing. (Speaking of which, when is Sony going to release *Vib-Ribbon* on PSN?!) If he *has* to pick a song, he's going with "December Hunting for Vegetarian F—kface," a 17-minute ambient, droning masterpiece from Stars of the Lid.

NOW PLAYING: *Prince of Persia, Far Cry 2, Valkyria Chronicles*

ROGER BURCHILL
MANAGING EDITOR

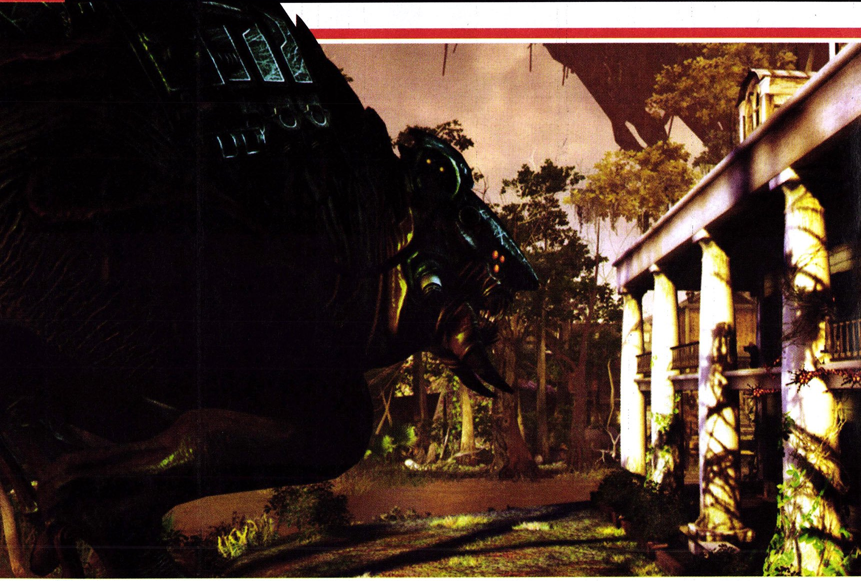
Besides his abiding love for Broadway and film musicals, Roger only *loves* two music groups: The Beatles and Fishbone. Since the Fab Four are planning an appearance in *ahem* another music game, Roger's going to go with Fishbone's "Party at Ground Zero" for his *GH:WT* set list. Yes, the world *will* turn to flowing pink vapor stew.

NOW PLAYING: *Tomb Raider: Underworld, Midnight Club L.A. Remix, LEGO Batman*

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Scott noticed a distant lack of punk rock in *GH:WT* and recommends a healthy dose of Black Flag's "Rise Above" as the best possible remedy. The guitars are interesting, the vocals are timeless, and the whole song just exudes passion and energy. Scott also wants to encourage developers to include more ska as Sublime and No Doubt just don't cut it.

NOW PLAYING: *Fallout 3, Skate 2, SSF2THDR (love that acronym)*



PS3 | R

Resistance 2

Remember to bring a friend

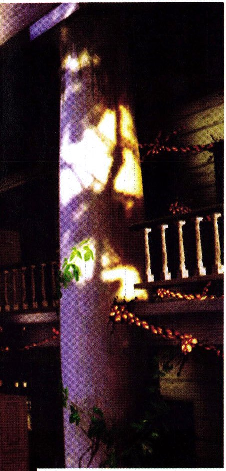
PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Insomniac Games

Massive Multiplayer

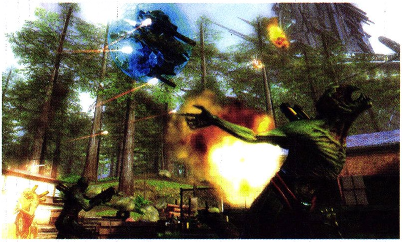
Despite a pretty effective structure, ensuring that you and your tight squad stay together and focused for big point rewards on a rival squad, the 60-player multiplayer could still devolve into free-for-alls with little structure or direction. Maybe your mileage will vary, and it certainly makes sense to join with friends you know to head online, but be careful what you find in the online wilds!

We've been dazzled since day one by *Resistance 2's* potential: its scale (three distinct play modes, plus the evident vastness of the sprawling environments), its team (Insomniac is probably the industry's most experienced PS3 development studio as this takes its game count to four on the two-year old platform), its look, and its continuing story of an infected soldier resisting the virulent Chimera. Each element, underpinned by the well-documented evidence of Insomniac's attention to detail and obsessive polish, was expected to shine. So imagine the surprise when, after 12 or so hours chasing the Chimera across non-descript locations within our home soil U.S. of A the single-player wrap up felt so decidedly, how do you say…meh?

Nathan Hale is, on paper, a fascinating protagonist in this against-all-odds resistance. After fighting off the Chimera threat in England in the original *Resistance: Fall of Man,* this sequel picks up right as the original ends, with Major Richard Blake recruiting Hale into the Sentinels, a team of similarly infected-but-not-turning elite soldiers. Two years pass to 1953, and Hale has shipped out from Iceland to the SRPA base on Treasure Island in the San Francisco Bay. Then the Chimera fleet attacks, bringing the threat to home soil. Funny thing is, maybe it's the oddly eclectic mix of locations you'll visit on the way to tracking down Daedalus—the entity seemingly running the Chimera show—but it never really feels like a battle for your homeland. With the exception of Henry Stillman's fabulous radio reports, describing horrific scenes in his stylized delivery that slowly slurs as the effects of his only remaining friend—the rapidly emptying bourbon bottle—kick in, it's hard to feel any empathy for the (former)



Urgency is inspired by your need to get inhibitors that will fight back the Chimera virus. As you chase through Cocodrie, LA, that's your biggest motivating fear (more so than the Jurassic threat right outside the bayou house!)



Against drones you simply have to pound as much ammo as you can into the blue, seemingly regenerating shields, until you finally make a hole and blow them to pieces.

Throughout the single-player campaign, be sure to blow up every car you see! Why? It's worth a Trophy!

denizens of these odd outposts. The inhabitants of logging town Orick, CA, or Twin Falls, ID, or Bryce Canyon, UT, or Cocodrie, LA have vanished or been cocooned by the Chimera, only to burst into Grim unlife from pods at the drop of a passing Sentinel's boot. Only on one occasion, where a body lay on a bed, an outstretched arm having dropped a pill bottle on the floor is there real, tangible evidence of a population threatened into self-destruction by an invading alien horde.

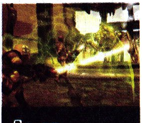
Even downtown Chicago—though one of the highlights for its flow, consistent threat, and impressive scripted cutscene moment against the 300-foot tall Leviathan—fails to conjure any real empathy, and serves merely as a stepping stone on a surprisingly anemic path to showdown. Talking of stepping stones, as you follow the path of submerged cars across a flooded roadway, it's evident just how the level design is forcing you down a specific linear path. It's practically impossible to get lost, even if you try to head off the beaten track to locate the hidden intel files that provide story background and occasional boss monster hints (and Trophies).

Threat level orange

If you played the original *Resistance,* you'll recognize most of the standard Chimera enemies. Additions, like the aforementioned Grims are straight out of the (fast-walking) zombie playbook. Similarly, the scuttling Reapers have been populating sci-fi shooters since, well, headcrabs, and back to the *Duke Nukem 3D* days of creatures jumping on your face for a quick bite. The Chameleons you first encounter in the woods of Orick—the ground shakes as they "uncloak" before leaping at you for a one-slash instakill—are an engaging threat (keep the shotgun armed when they're around), but when you encounter them on your first excursion aboard a Chimera ship they seem decidedly out of place. These instakills, alongside the waterborne, indestructible Furys that populate every body of water, are truly frustrating more often than challenging. You die, you learn their position and pattern, you adjust your tactics accordingly. But first, you die. It's often a cheap death that I couldn't help but feel would be somehow below Insomniac's high-falutin' design philosophy. But evidently I was wrong.

The sterile design of the first Chimera ship you board is shocking in its blandness. Fortunately, your late-game, close-to-the-conclusion encounter aboard another ship is far more inventive both in its visual style, environmental challenge, and boss encounters. Against these creatures, *Resistance: FoM* players will have to get used to just carrying two weapons at a time. The magnum, particularly its secondary fire explosive bullet is fabulous

> A man and his son need help, and all I reach for is this microphone.
>
> -Henry Stillman, broadcaster



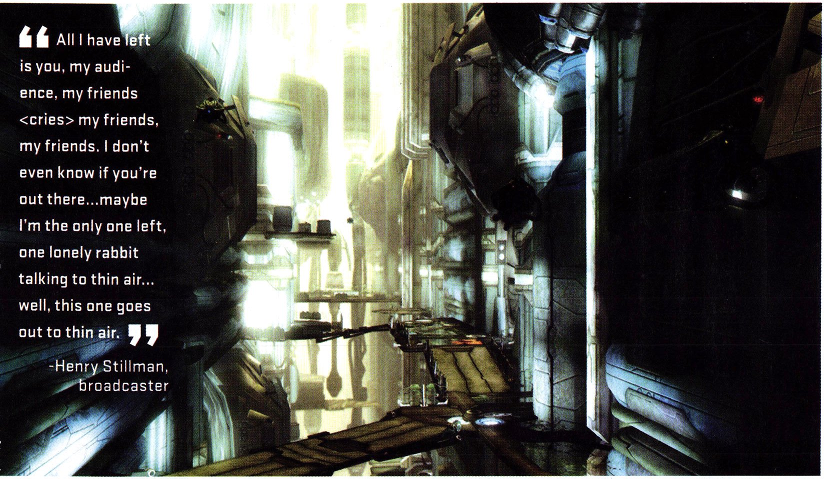
Co-op Rewards

The promised eight-player co-operative gameplay is *Resistance 2's* most redeeming feature among its three-pronged attack. It works incredibly well, creating dynamic challenges for your squad, so even if you're on a familiar map your objectives and points of threat or control can vary. And you can pretty much always find a game. It's also worth giving a shout-out to the community that we witnessed in our testing. Everyone was surprisingly friendly, helpful when n00bs came in, and seemed determined to make the most of the three class system.

To be frank, my most fun moment with *Resistance 2* was as the Soldier tank at the head of our merry band as seemingly hundreds of Grims charged us down a narrow walkway. Keeping my finger firmly on fire, with a Spec Ops buddy constantly feeding me ammo (and helping maintain the protective shield), and Medic lobbing health packs when needed, it was a frenetic, fun, and perfectly rewarding co-op experience. With persistent rewards for your play time, and a decent balance to ensure you score points regardless of if you actually get the killing blow, it's a good choice for newcomers to shooters, as well as the pros.

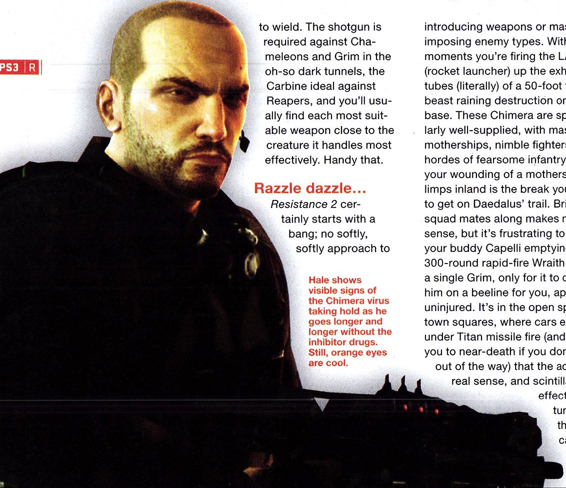
Oh, and specific Trophies are available for your contribution to the co-op campaign, so no excuse not to get online.

> “All I have left is you, my audience, my friends <cries> my friends, my friends. I don't even know if you're out there...maybe I'm the only one left, one lonely rabbit talking to thin air... well, this one goes out to thin air.”
>
> -Henry Stillman, broadcaster



It's not surprising that game developers have seen the likes of *Star Wars,* but no points for guessing the inspiration behind one particular space-based cutscene you trigger.

PS3 | R



Hale shows visible signs of the Chimera virus taking hold as he goes longer and longer without the inhibitor drugs. Still, orange eyes are cool.

to wield. The shotgun is required against Chameleons and Grim in the oh-so dark tunnels, the Carbine ideal against Reapers, and you'll usually find each most suitable weapon close to the creature it handles most effectively. Handy that.

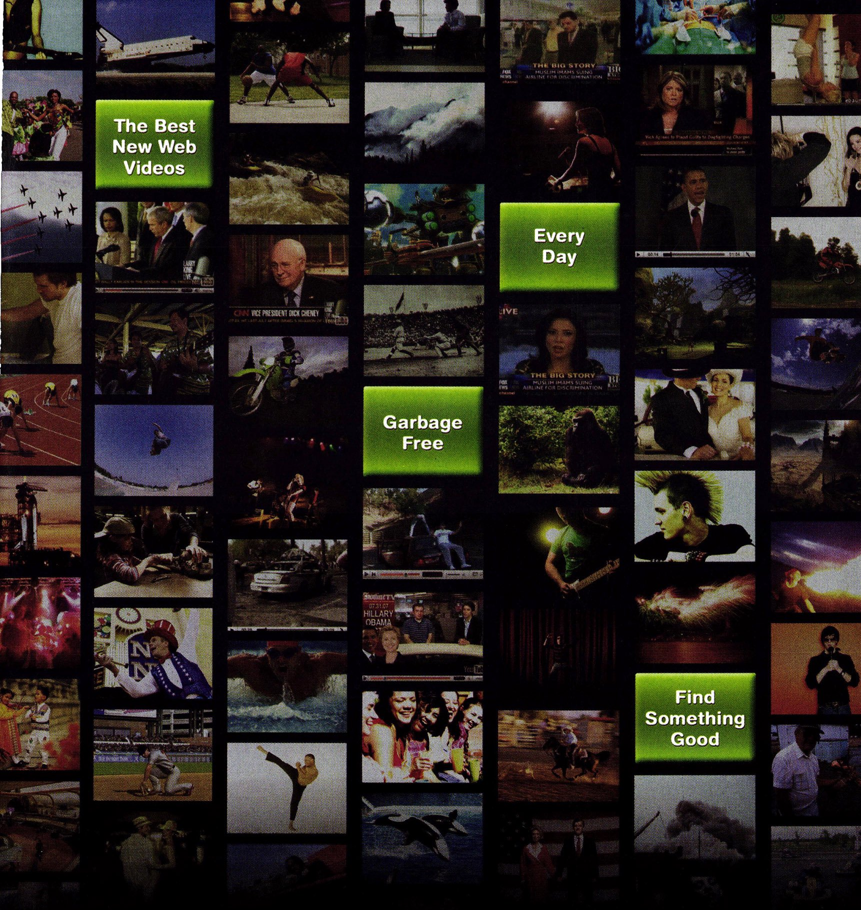
Razzle dazzle...

Resistance 2 certainly starts with a bang; no softly, softly approach to introducing weapons or massive, imposing enemy types. Within moments you're firing the LAARK (rocket launcher) up the exhaust tubes (literally) of a 50-foot tall beast raining destruction on the base. These Chimera are spectacularly well-supplied, with massive motherships, nimble fighters, and hordes of fearsome infantry, so your wounding of a mothership that limps inland is the break you need to get on Daedalus' trail. Bringing squad mates along makes military sense, but it's frustrating to see your buddy Capelli emptying the 300-round rapid-fire Wraith into a single Grim, only for it to dodge him on a beeline for you, apparently uninjured. It's in the open spaces of town squares, where cars explode under Titan missile fire (and burn you to near-death if you don't get out of the way) that the action has real sense, and scintillating effect. Unfortunately, these occasions are simply too few to balance out the moments of path-following and uninspired tricks and traps taken from the playbook of so many other shooters—albeit the best ones.

The biggest takeaway, as the final cutscene played, was how surprising *Resistance 2* turned out to be. Hale's character and fight against the virus was well played, solidly voiced, yet missed the expected spark. The large boss monster battles were memorable for their physical scale, but not their inventive mechanics. Where did the dazzle go? Fortunately, the co-operative gameplay holds up superbly (see sidebar, p.63) and adds tremendously to the value, and alongside the community features will ensure a long-lasting place in many PS3 shooter fans' repertoire. But *Resistance 2's* single-player has taken the sheen off Insomniac's seemingly impossible-to-tarnish image, and I really look forward to them stepping up to the challenge in *Resistance 3.*

Rob Smith

★★★★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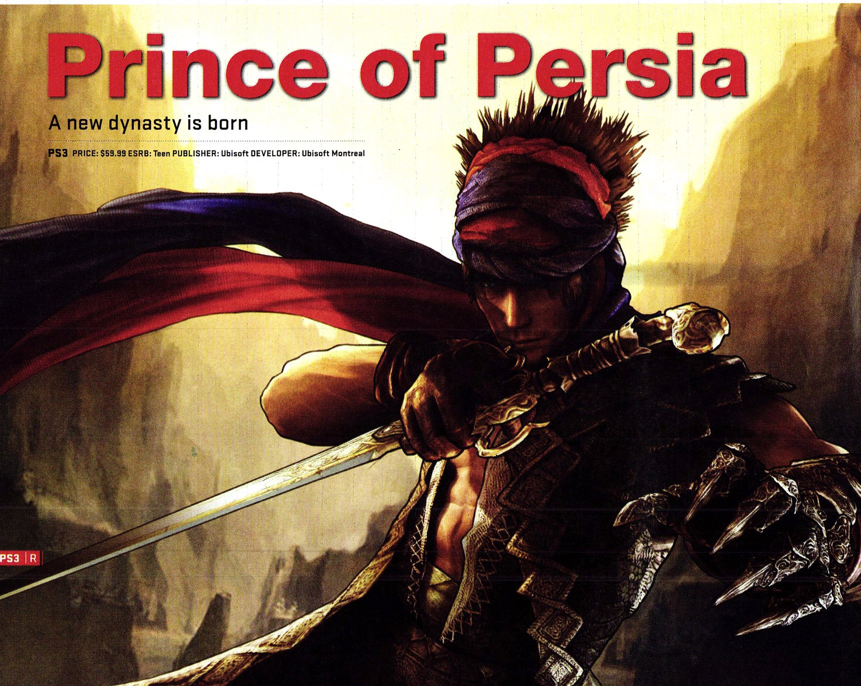
Prince of Persia

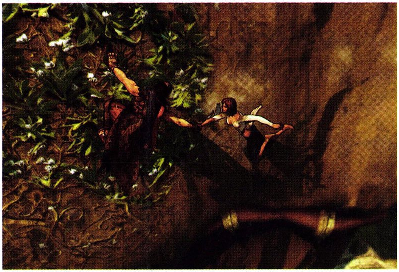
A new dynasty is born

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft **DEVELOPER:** Ubisoft Montreal

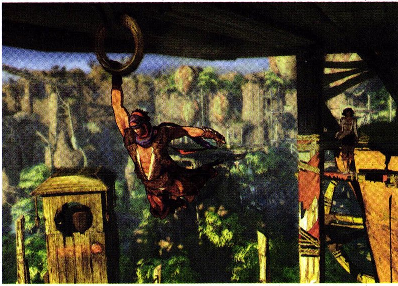


There's a moment in the opening tutorial segments of *Prince of Persia* when Elika collapses after using her magic. Depleted and helpless, she depends solely on you for a brief instant, and you rise to the occasion, scooping up the ethereal princess and carrying her for what amounts to 20 seconds at best. It's slow, deliberate, and mildly frustrating—you are reduced to trudging along, hobbled by your companion, unable to perform the fantastic feats of astounding acrobatics and swirling swordplay that seemed to define you mere seconds ago.

This moment stands out in my mind because it almost never occurs again throughout the game. And it got me thinking: It's as if the team behind this majestic adventure is setting the tone for what's to come by showing you a buddy system gone horribly wrong, shortly before debuting what will likely become the new standard in AI-controlled companions.



What would a platformer be without vines? These are your resting points on cliff faces, allowing you to catch your breath while deciding where to go next. Watch how Elika piggybacks on the Prince—an action that draws the two characters closer together.



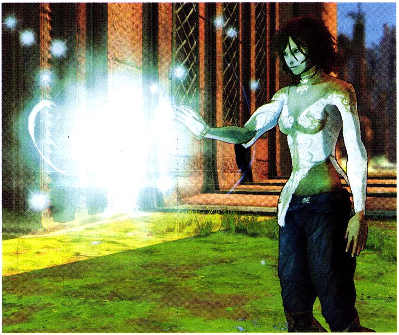
Wherever you go, Elika will follow, keeping pace with your acrobatic runs throughout these lofty regions. She's also available to lend a helping hand with a quick tap of Triangle—the equivalent of a double-jump in other games.

Pay attention to where Elika stands during idle moments. As you play on, she will gradually move closer and closer to you.

If you've been following the progress of *Prince of Persia,* you've probably heard all about it by now: how Elika will always be by your side, how she will never be in your way. She will always help you, she will never hinder your progress. She will make you better. It's been one of the key sell points for this PS3 reboot of the classic franchise, and also the one aspect most fraught with peril, because if the team didn't succeed, it could've sunk the whole experience.

The good news: It works. Elika truly is a partner to be reckoned with, a constant companion who ably assists you during breathtaking platforming sequences and who soldiers by your side in thrilling combat. She is everything you could possibly want in a secondary character, and possibly a few things you've never considered. It's an extraordinary achievement, indeed.

And yet it's not the most remarkable thing about this game. The relationship between the Prince and Elika might be pretty close to perfect—but more impressive is the relationship this game will forge with *you,* the player.



You need to collect only about half the total Light Seeds to complete the game, but Trophy fiends will surely get a kick out of hunting down every last one.

Graphics that rule

Prince of Persia might best be described as a classic fairy tale with modern-day sensibilities. The conflict is that timeless duel between good and evil, a war between two gods that manifests itself in black-and-white fashion, both figuratively and literally. The world is on a scale beyond reason, with fantastic architecture and natural settings that defy reality. The protagonists are larger than life, with a confidence that borders on swagger. The antagonists are simple archetypes infused with contemporary psychology. And the game itself is in many ways a throwback to old-school classics, but it's suffused with a playability that's become the hallmark of current-gen games.

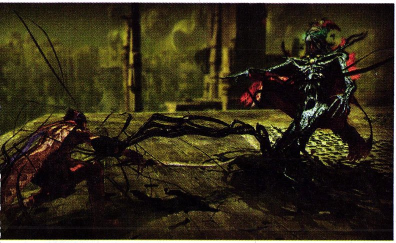
It's this very juxtaposition of modern and classic that makes *Prince of Persia* so appealing, and it's part of the reason why this game is able to create such a strong bond with the player. But before I elaborate on that, a brief word about the graphics. Simply put, *Prince of Persia* is stunning. I'm not a tech guy; I can't tell you if this pushes the PS3 to its limits, or how many polygons it uses. But what I can say is that this game overflows with style. The developers have consistently referred to the look as "illustrative," aiming to indicate that the in-game graphics are on par with the concept art that often surrounds a project of this nature. And they've succeeded,

Fight the Corruption

Evil isn't pretty. In fact, it's an oozing, inky mess that sticks to surfaces and will kill you on contact. Every area in *Persia* is overrun with this so-called Corruption until you beat back the boss and find your way to the Fertile Grounds. Once healed, the region is free of Corruption, opening up new pathways and revealing new acrobatic challenges. This gives every area two distinct reasons to be there: first, you'll need to clear the area, and next you'll need to explore the area to find Light Seeds, which are unleashed into healed lands and are necessary to unlock new Fertile Grounds.

The static Corruption isn't the only challenge, though. At certain points throughout the game, a boss character will unleash a new form of Corruption that will infect every unhealed area. These forms include tentacles that require precision timing to bypass and air particles that will kill you with prolonged contact, turning certain segments into intense time-attack challenges.

As the Prince might suggest himself, sometimes it's nice to just stop for a second and enjoy the view. But make sure you also take the opportunity to seek out some hidden areas where you might find a few extra Light Seeds.



The Alchemist is one of the four major foes (besides the evil god Ahriman). Each boss poses a different combat challenge, and you'll face all of them several times throughout your journey.

PS3 | R

The transformation from corrupted to healed region is startling. What starts out as dark, gloomy, and covered with vicious ooze is restored to a vibrant, colorful realm awash with light and life, all thanks to your efforts.

imbuing this world with a mature storybook style that combines elements of sophisticated graphic novels and slick animation, marrying the softness and palette of watercolor illustrations with the boldness of cel-shaded imagery. The graphics are brought to further life thanks to some of the best foley I've heard in a game, providing aural heft to every leap across a cliff face, every thud against a column, and every gripfall down the side of a castle wall.

Playing with power

Looks alone can't create a bond as strong as *Persia's* (though they certainly help). The real connection comes through the action, and *Persia* delivers an experience that engaged me in several unexpected ways.

The gameplay itself can be divided into two basic parts: acrobatics (or platforming) and combat. And truth told, neither is revolutionary. In *Prince of Persia,* you run, you jump, you climb. Then you fight bad guys. Rinse, repeat.

But here's what *is* interesting: Right after you complete the introductory sequence, you have every single acrobatic and combat skill unlocked. Nothing about the Prince or Elika changes for the remainder of the game. Oh, sure, you technically unlock Elika's "powers," but those really just turn on various magic plates, allowing you to access each area's Fertile Grounds.

This departure from the norm—typically, you open up new skills as you master the old ones—completely changed how I interacted with the world. What starts as a slower-paced exercise in traversing through tough terrains eventually morphs into a fluid, intuitive sprint through hostile regions. The challenge developed from "Can I even get there?" to "How *quickly* can I get there?" to "How cool would it be if I took the long way around, racing without a single break in motion, simply because I can?" In other words, the game delivers to the player an astounding sense of accomplishment: The more I played, the more powerful I felt, despite the fact that my

Every single battle in this game is one-on-one (well, *two*-on-one, since you've got Elika on your side). Once you master the combat, you can dispatch some foes with a single well-timed combo, especially if you can use the environment against them.

> “The game delivers an astounding sense of accomplishment: The more I played, the more powerful I felt, despite the fact that my on-screen avatar didn't actually gain a single new ability throughout our journey.”

Although you can go anywhere at anytime, you can't reach a region's Fertile Ground until you unlock the requisite magic plate. These plates then trigger a dazzling acrobatic mini-challenge.

on-screen avatar didn't actually gain a single new ability throughout our journey. This same effect applies to the combat as well. What starts as a simple brawler quickly develops into a fluid combo-based battle system where you can link together a series of moves and defeat a foe in one long, perfectly timed combo.

The gameplay is mirrored in effect by the open-world, non-linear structure. Now, to be clear, the narrative itself is somewhat linear. There is a beginning. There is an end. But how you get from point A to B is completely up to you. Just like your skills, the entire world is unlocked shortly after you begin the game, and you can visit any area at any time. This creates an interesting relationship with the characters, as it's up to the player to put together all the disparate story tidbits that are delivered at the various chokepoints; it's up to me to “feel” how the cumulative effect of all the character cooperation draws our two heroes together. I witnessed all their interactions, triggering them both directly and indirectly, and I was the one who was responsible for creating a new reality out of the sum of these parts. Their growing fondness was the result of both my actions and my perceptions, creating a greater player-character bond than I usually find in third-person action games.

Hail to the new Prince

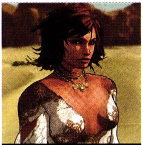
No great relationship comes without a few problems, and I certainly have a handful of quibbles with *Prince of Persia*. First, nothing is ever really at risk here. The game is so forgiving with its liberal respawn points, and the platforming is so intuitive, that a player with modest skills might be left feeling a little unchallenged by it all. Likewise, combat suffers from lacking a middle ground: Before you master it, fighting is too button-mashy, but once you nail it, the challenge is pretty much gone. Every battle is still a cinematic event, but it's not much of a gameplay test.

Another concern that bears mentioning is the Prince himself. With his smirk and swagger—his dazzling white teeth glimmering beneath the grime (really!)—the Prince is more Hollywood movie star than ancient Persian powerhouse. But here's the thing: I bought into his anachronistic characterization right away—I found his bravado infectious. Still, the Prince is sure to be a polarizing character, one that gamers will initially love or hate. My advice for the haters: Give him a chance. He will grow on you. I promise.

Finally, the game is on the shorter side, clocking in at less than 15 hours for the first playthrough. That said, the open-world structure practically begs for a repeat performance, especially considering that the world will change based on how you approach it, offering a modestly different challenge depending on your choices. It might not be a perfect way to extend the experience, but it will surely help tide you over while you eagerly await the sequel hinted at in *Persia's* pitch-perfect ending.

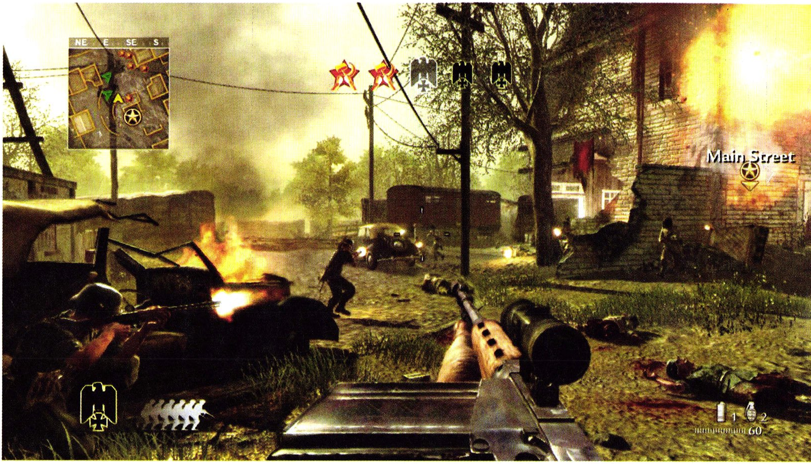
Gary Steinman

★★★★½



Courtly conversation

While the story does an able job of developing the relationship between the Prince and Elika, their bond grows even stronger thanks to the on-demand dialogue. At any point during the game, you can tap L2 to trigger a few lines of extra chatter. Sometimes it's context-sensitive: a hint about what to do next, a bit of backstory about the area you're visiting. At other times, it'll be superfluous banter that reveals more about the two characters, be it their personalities or details about their pasts. For the most part, this dialogue is witty, charming, and revealing, helping build the bond between Elika and the Prince, as well as between the player and the characters.



Bottom left. See the row of guys? It's your team's Momentum meter. Fill it by killing enemies. It lets you cap flags faster.

Call of Duty:

World at War

PS3 | R

Zombies? Nazis? Hell yes!

You're trapped in a room with way too many windows. Outside that room? Nazi zombies. Endless amounts of them. Your goal is to survive as many zombie waves as you can. Each kill nets you cash, and you can use that cash to purchase weapons, unlock more rooms, and more. It's just a small mini-game you unlock when you beat the campaign, but oh boy is it fun, and creepy, and intense. Play it alone or cooperatively. The experiences differ vastly.

Heed the call

PS3 PRICE: **$59.99** ESRB: **Mature** PUBLISHER: **Activision** DEVELOPER: **Treyarch**

Aim and fire: A soldier's bread and butter. Japanese or Nazi, if I spy either my first instinct is *supposed* to be to shoot: to tap L1 to aim* then R1 to fire whichever German, Russian, American, or Japanese weapon I happen to grip in my battle-hardened hands. Whether I'm playing as the American Miller or the Russian Petrenko, whether I'm flushing out trenches in Peleliu with my flamethrower or sniping Nazis from the rooftops of Stalingrad; whether I'm on foot, controlling a tank, or gunning down Japanese Zeros in the air, it should be straightforward. See an enemy, point my gun, bang!

Inside a soldier's head

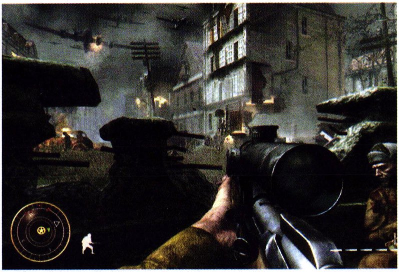
But what if the three German soldiers standing in front of me hold their hands above their heads in the universal gesture of surrender? What if my commanding officer, a bitter man (some call him a patriotic hero, and they're not wrong) who witnessed Nazis ransacking his beloved motherland, tells me to shoot, to show no mercy? What if I've already seen enemy troops pretend to surrender, only to make a grab for our guns the moment we step forward to apprehend them?

Call of Duty: World at War didn't come with a Soldier's Handbook, no wartime code of conduct to follow. And having never been in a war myself, I have no idea what the rules are. What's the right choice? The practical choice? The *good* choice?

I pull the trigger. Normally, when I pop a bullet into an enemy and see blood squirt from their falling bodies and hear their screams as they die, my heart leaps—just a little!—in smug satisfaction. Draw your own conclusions about whether that makes me a psychopath. I'll just say that I'm happy because the gruesome death sequence signifies a successful display of skill.

But this time, I don't feel smug or delighted or like I've avenged my

From the islands of the Pacific to the sacked cities of Eastern Europe: *World at War's* graphics utilize *CoD4's* formidable game engine.



This sniping mission set in Stalingrad is one of two campaigns that isn't playable in the four-player co-op. That guy in the corner? Your controversial sergeant, Reznov.

motherland. I feel dirty. While showing no mercy may be in my character's nature, it's not in mine, and I don't care whether the Germans "deserved" it. They were unarmed. Throughout *Call of Duty: World at War,* I'm repeatedly faced with this disconnect. The characters I control and the situations I encounter constantly clash with my own moral code, and this, I believe, is one of the game's great successes. Whose ideals are right? Theirs or mine? *World at War* refuses to give a straight answer, forcing me to participate in the game's violent scenarios with my intellect as well as my trigger finger.

Surviving the chaos

But not to worry. Gameplay isn't bled, wounded, or murdered on the altar of "art," a fact proven by the variety of weapon types, the brutal AI, and the vigorous online modes. (If you're buying *World at War* for the single-player, you're missing out on the bulk of the game! [See boxouts.])

Setting leafy trees ablaze to topple the Japanese snipers hiding in them, panicking when Japanese troops holler "banzai" before they rush me, sniping a German general while his bodyguards fire back... *World at War* is rife with scripted scenarios. And it's fun. Unfortunately, it lacks the extra two layers of polish that made *Call of Duty 4* so great. At times, collision is slightly off, or I get stuck between a wall and a well-intentioned fellow soldier (frustrating because he won't budge until I personally activate the next checkpoint, and of course, I can't move...Catch-22). And I hold a personal grudge against the hard-to-decipher grenade indicator, which caused my death a hundred too many times.

But still, even flawed, *World at War* is fun. And it has an unexpected soundtrack that swaps the normal sweeping orchestral scores with context-specific sounds, like gritty and raw industrial tones or haunting, almost ghostly, melodies. Oh, and yes, I'm sure you've noticed by now that *World at War* is (yet another) WWII shooter...but I don't judge a game by its setting, and I'm glad I didn't. As a whole package—the thought-provoking themes, the historically accurate enemy tactics, the detailed multiplayer and cooperative modes, and the enticing extras, like Trophies and Zombie Nazis—*World at War* is more than worthy of a spot in the *Call of Duty* library.

Teresa Dun

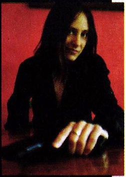
★★★★½

Online: It's great out here

PERKS: Yes! RANKS: Yes! CHALLENGES: Yes! LEADERBOARDS: Yes!

With 12 maps, 11 modes, and all the unlockables and achievables mentioned above, *World at War* is going to keep me busy for months. But beyond what can be earned, the gameplay itself is quick and satisfying. Plus, with auto-aim turned on, it doesn't matter whether you're skilled at FPS games or not, you can still make a few kills. Though, of course, skillful players have the advantage. My conclusion: Anyone can enjoy *World at War*'s multiplayer. From customizing classes to leveling up your rank, the game constantly gives you new reasons to keep diving back in. Plus, forming squads (to keep track of your favorite people on the battlefield) and parties (to ensure you stick with your real life friends even when your joining random matches) makes it so you'll always be playing with your buddies.

Kornelia Takacs's favorite custom class



Here's what the noted female *Quake* champion, now an associate PC game designer at Treyarch, picks as her custom class of choice.

NAME OF LOADOUT: MP40Stealth

PRIMARY WEAPON: MP40 (With dual magazines)
SECONDARY WEAPON: .357 Magnum
PRIMARY GRENADE: Frag
SPECIAL GRENADE: Tabun

PERK1: Special Grenades x3
PERK2: Camouflage
PERK3: Extreme Conditioning
VEHICLE PERK: Ordnance Training

"I like to move around the level quickly and the extra ammunition that the dual magazines provide. This custom class is ideal for quickly infiltrating enemy lines. The Camouflage perk gives me the ability to remain stealthy while I move around. I use dual magazines instead of the suppressor attachment so when I do feel ready to attack I can fire my weapon longer, potentially taking out more enemies. I find the Camouflage perk very valuable in Search and Destroy and Capture the Flag. I use the extra grenades perk, with the Tabun gas selected. This special grenade is a very effective tactical weapon when the enemy is gathered in one condensed area. It is ideal for War and Headquarters. For the vehicle perk I generally use Ordnance training to get that slight advantage in the turret reload speed that is so important, especially when you are combating another tank."

Co-op, with a twist

You haven't played *Call of Duty: World at War* until you've tried it with friends. Two-player splitscreen, or up to four players online. Doesn't matter. Playing through the campaign with real people hollering "grenade!" or "take the left" is the best way to experience *World at War*. For even more fun, you can use collectible Death Cards to tweak the game. The Thunder card makes enemies explode when shot in the head, and when you use the Body Armor card to make only headshots kill enemies, plowing through campaigns becomes a gruesome visual treat. Out of the thirteen cards, here are my two favorites:

Vampire: "Steal life from your prey. Only recharge your health by getting kills."

Sticks & Stones: "Your weapon arsenal consists of a knife and a bunch of rocks."

---

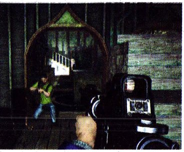
*Auto-aim: A guilty pleasure I feel absolutely zero shame for because it's both balanced and smooth. If I can get my crosshair near my enemy's head, auto-aim will zone in and help me get that headshot.

Quantum of Solace

PS3 | R

License to kill—a lot

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Activision DEVELOPER: Treyarch



Sure, the game looks and feels polished, but it's still a total shooter-by-numbers.

Playing *Quantum of Solace* is a lot like ordering a small popcorn at your local multiplex. You might start off happy enough, mindlessly munching away during the endless previews, but then 10 minutes into the movie, the near-empty bag littered with half-popped kernels makes you wonder why you didn't shell out the small fortune for a larger size. In other words, it leaves you wanting more while wondering if what you had was worth it.

And that's a shame, because *Quantum* had a heckuva lot of potential. The game is a slick, well-produced affair—a successful hybrid of first- and third-person action unfolding across elaborate Bondian set pieces. Adding to the polish: excellent likenesses of all the characters, along with impressive voice-work from the entire cast. (Really, Dame Judi Dench could read the phonebook and make it sound interesting.)

But *Quantum* suffers from a uniquely non-Bondian shortfall: It is profoundly adequate. The game does everything just well enough, but unlike our esteemed superspy, absolutely nothing here impresses, including the multiplayer (see sidebar). It's also rather short—the single-player can be beaten in a handful of sessions, clocking in at perhaps six hours of playtime. When you consider those two factors along with the fact that the PS3 is overcrowded with stellar shooters this holiday season, *Quantum* is tough to recommend, despite its yeoman-like effort.

Return to Royale

The biggest surprise in *Quantum of Solace* isn't the fact that it's merely sufficient. Rather, it's the fact that it's not a game based on *Quantum of Solace.* Instead, *Quantum* (the game) borrows from both *Quantum* (the movie) and *Casino Royale* (its superior cinematic predecessor). Think of it as a best-of compilation of vignettes and remixes from both films, and you'll be pleasantly carried along through this adventure. Just don't look to the game to provide a coherent plot or cohesive storyline. Every individual level might be well-framed and scripted, but none of the action connects together in any way that either retells the story from the films or adds anything new to your perceptions of Bond's world.

But that's OK, because developer Treyarch nailed the atmosphere, which in some ways is more important to a licensed game than story itself. Where it falls short is in the action. As a first-person shooter with a third-person cover system, the game works well enough. The control is fairly tight and the transition between perspectives is fairly seamless. (Plus, it allows you to actually see Bond, which must make some producer happy considering they probably paid a pretty penny to include his likeness.) The problem is, you'll spend an awful lot of time *not* being a spy. Sure, you can sneak around, but only for limited bursts, and often not successfully, meaning you'll find yourself in endless gunfights with countless goons. This gets worse in the final third of the game, where Treyarch seemed to rip several pages from *Uncharted's* playbook, upping the difficulty not with creative challenge but instead with wave after wave after wave of baddies, turning the game into a frustrating endurance trial rather than a thrilling test of your skills.

The game is not enough

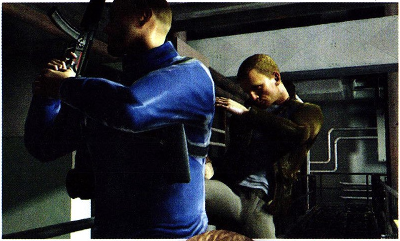
Quantum tries to mix things up with a handful of unique missions, along with a few breaks from the gunplay. Problem is, these breaks come in the form of uninspired quick-time events. Run at an enemy, for example, and you can initiate a takedown move that requires all of one random button press. It might look cool the first few times, but it becomes incredibly dull soon after. A few boss fights play out in a similar fashion, with several QTEs strung together in a cinematic fashion, but the challenge (and hence the engagement) just isn't there. Even worse: You can hack computers, shut off cameras, and unlock doors, but the corresponding mini-games often involve nothing more than holding down the Square button for three seconds.

As for those unique missions, my favorite might be the reenactment of the poisoning in *Casino Royale,* where Bond had to get the defibrillator in his Aston Martin. It's a simple task: Stumble out of the casino and through the parking lot. But the dramatic camera movements, zooming in and out to mimic the panicked, poisoned perceptions of a dying man, made it a cinematic delight. Too bad there's nothing else to it, leaving you once again wanting more. Likewise, the other chase scenes (the parkour run from *Casino,* for example) are also more cinematic than challenging, providing very little gameplay value, leaving you hungry for something deeper.

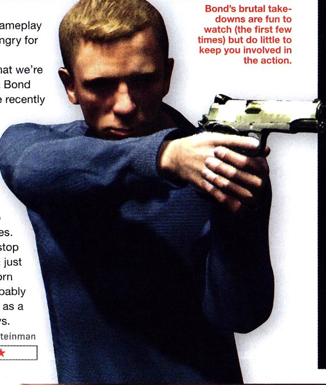
Maybe we'll get what we're craving from the next Bond game. After all, we've recently witnessed the revival of a stunning new Bond in the movies. Perhaps his solid but mediocre game debut is attributable to time constraints to hit movie release dates. Or perhaps I should stop worrying about it and just order the large popcorn instead—heck, it probably costs about as much as a videogame these days.

Gary Steinman

★★★

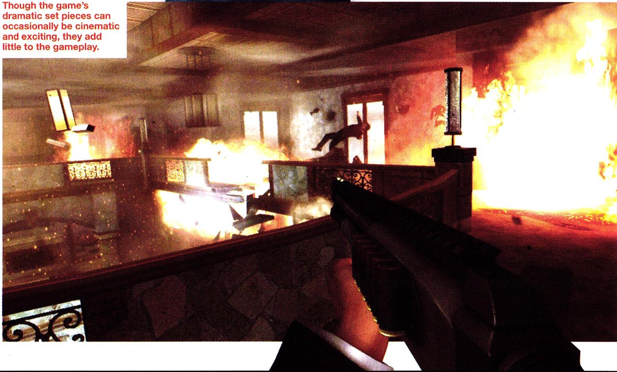


Bond's brutal takedowns are fun to watch (the first few times) but do little to keep you involved in the action.

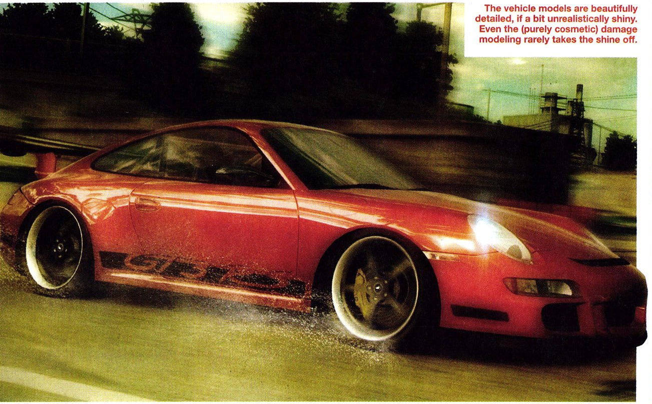


Putting the 00 in n00b

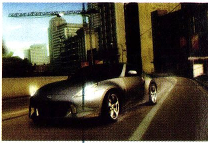
Quantum's multiplayer flirts with creativity, but sadly, its half-baked ideas never quite pan out. A "gadget" system lets you buy and equip two general upgrades (like added stability when aiming or an extra weapon slot), but the upgrades are unbalanced and put new players at a distinct disadvantage. The "Bond Versus" game mode—in which every player takes a turn as Bond in a one-against-all scenario which, in theory, is intended to encourage stealth—stacks the odds so heavily against Bond that the entire game just falls apart. Really the only unique idea that works is the "Golden Gun" mode (which forces everyone to fight for the titular weapon). Besides these interesting but ultimately unsuccessful ideas, multiplayer is awash in a sea of convention and mediocrity. Generic weapons, standard match types, and limited customization options (especially in public matches) create an experience that, like the single-player, is more than a few kernels short of satisfaction.



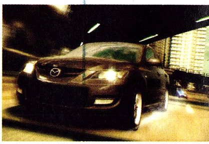
Though the game's dramatic set pieces can occasionally be cinematic and exciting, they add little to the gameplay.



The vehicle models are beautifully detailed, if a bit unrealistically shiny. Even the (purely cosmetic) damage modeling rarely takes the shine off.



Undercover's map is positively enormous, and though the different areas don't look all that dissimilar, the varied street layouts provide distinct driving challenges.



Police are aggressive, making cop chases extremely tense. Luckily you can knock down specially marked obstacles to take out pursuers.

Need for Speed:

Undercover

Painfully stylish

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: EA Black Box

I'm all for a sense of style. A slick look can grant a ho-hum game an eye-catching sheen. But with videogames—and any sort of software, really—style absolutely must take a back seat to functionality.

Which brings us to *Need for Speed: Undercover.* Slickly designed and frankly gorgeous in spots, *Undercover* positively oozes style, from its beautiful car models and nifty speed effects to its rich lighting and oversaturated colors. It even has a sexy pause menu. Really!

There's just one problem: All this style and graphical richness hits the game's performance. Scenes with a lot of action can suffer from slowdown. You encounter occasional stutter even racing solo down a fairly low-key straightaway. In a game centered around shooting super-powered sports cars through dense city streets, those little hiccups do serious damage—when you're trying to dodge through heavy traffic, even a tiny pause can completely blow your sense of timing.

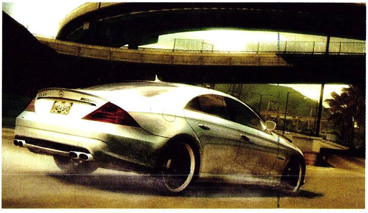
I wish that weren't the case, because aside from performance, *Undercover* is a solid racer. The enormous city offers loads of different driving environments, with a variety of race events easily accessible through the GPS map *(Burnout Paradise* lesson learned: no need to manually drive to each one). The experience-based progression system adds a nice sense of accomplishment, and you even get points and cash just for driving around between events.

Some interesting event types offer diversion from the standard street racing. Highway battles, for example, require you to dodge traffic as you try to pull ahead of an opponent by a certain distance; while outrun events throw away the route markers, asking you only to stay in the lead, on whatever route you choose, for a certain period of time. Unfortunately, these events aren't accessible in the slick, well-integrated online mode. Online does feature the objective-based game Cops 'n' Robbers, where a team of police tries to prevent a team of robbers from ferrying cash from one location to another. But aside from that, it's strictly point-to-point and circuit races.

No one's going to deny that *Undercover* is one fine-looking creature. And it certainly offers enough depth and variety to keep racing fans plenty busy. Overall, a wholly competent game—but persistent performance issues prevent it from being anything more than that.

Joe Rybicki

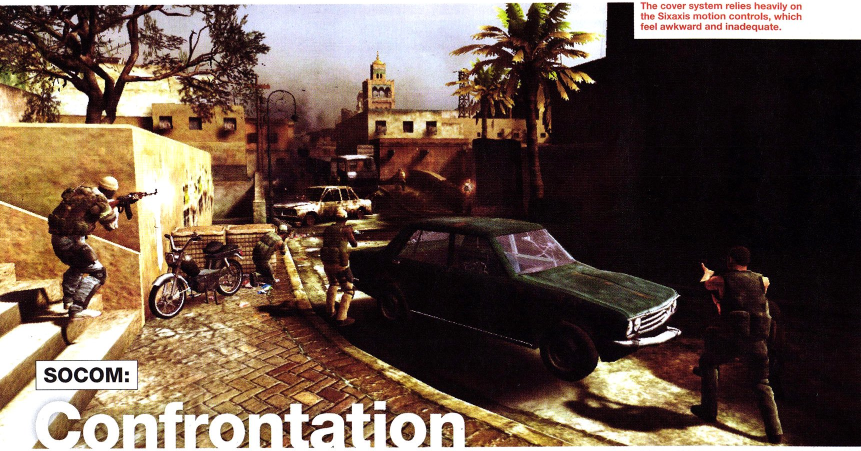
★★★½



Car upgrades are simple and intuitive, but there's a catch: You need to level up before picking up the high-end stuff—it's not just a money thing.

Undercover is the 15th *Need for Speed* game in 14 years, counting "side" games like *V-Rally* and *Porsche Unleashed.*

SOCOM: Confrontation



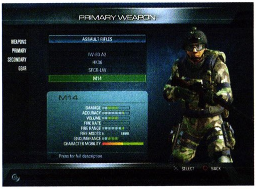
The cover system relies heavily on the Sixaxis motion controls, which feel awkward and inadequate.

Please pardon the dust

PS3 PRICE: $39.99; $59.99 with headset (worth it) ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Slant Six Games

The launch of *SOCOM: Confrontation* was, to put it politely, a colossal disaster. Lag, random disconnects, weird glitches; and that was if you actually managed to get into a match. To Slant Six's credit, server stability has improved substantially since those dark first weeks, but connectivity still isn't as reliable as it absolutely needs to be for an online-only game. Plus, promised features ranging from Trophy support to the ability to join a friend's match are still not implemented. And what makes this situation so disappointing is that the game itself clearly has a lot to offer.

The extensive loadout options are impressively detailed and let you select everything from the print on your camouflage to the sight on your gun. Customizable controls and multiple camera options will help you adjust to *Confrontation's* particular gameplay quirks (though the painfully unintuitive weapon quick-swap system can't be altered). And with seven match types and a myriad of settings, matches are easily configured to your exact preferences.



PRIMARY WEAPON

WEAPONS
PRIMARY
SECONDARY
GEAR

ASSAULT RIFLES
IW-80 A2
HK36
SFCR-LW
M14

M14
DAMAGE
ACCURACY
VOLUME
FIRE RATE
FIRE RANGE
FIRE MODES
ENCUMBRANCE
CHARACTER MOBILITY

Press for full description

SELECT BACK

Your choice of camo and armor can dramatically affect your combat performance.

The basic gameplay, at first glance, very closely resembles that of any other solidly constructed third-person shooter, though factors like the massive maps and inability to heal yourself encourage a distinct, team-oriented play style. If you're a run-and-gunner, *Confrontation* might not suit you since its deliberate pacing and realism really don't cater to that style of play—though it's encouraging to note that respawns are an option, and that fast-action gameplay can be quite fun despite being decidedly un-*SOCOM.*

Though team tactics will indeed keep you alive, the game can't *force* you to play tactically, and in my experiences, trying to function as a unit with a group of relentlessly uncooperative strangers typically devolved into hide-and-seek sessions that culminated in my abrupt, unforeseen demise. The moral of the story? Join a clan or at least find friends you can play with consistently to eke the most out of the *SOCOM* experience.

Unfortunately, *Confrontation* still isn't exceptionally compelling, thanks largely to the technical letdowns and its niche appeal. If its server issues are ever completely resolved and its features fully fleshed out, the game will become a worthwhile purchase, mainly for fans of the series, and those looking to become involved in a serious online community. But considering the number of other quality shooters on the market, gamers have no compelling reason to wait around.

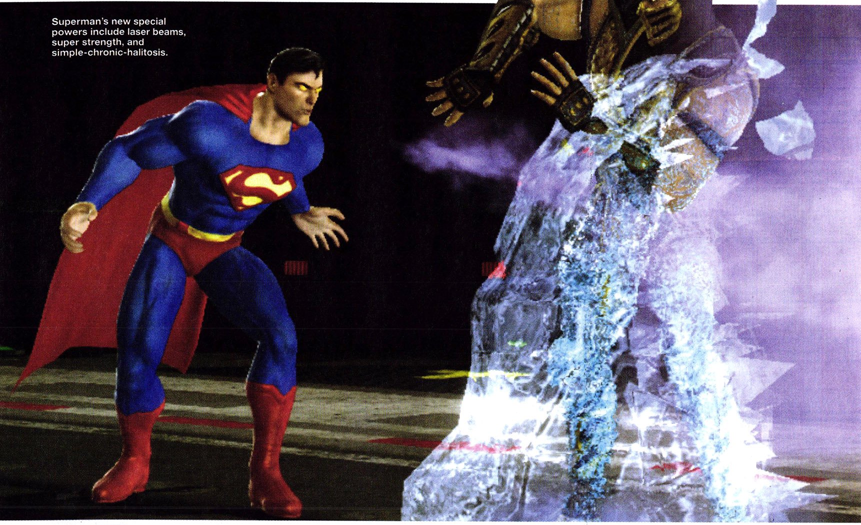
Scott Butterworth

★★★½

The Beauty of a Battlefield

The maps might be the best part of *Confrontation.* With the exception of the awkwardly shaped Quarantine, they're tightly designed and vast. You'll quickly grow accustomed to them and start to develop your own paths, but learning their intricacies takes time; points of conflict tend to differ between matches rather than being the same every time, making communication vital; and the visual and audio detailing is superb. True, there are only seven maps, but the quality far outweighs the quantity.

The most amusing glitch I experienced was spawning without a weapon. I had to beg my teammates to kill me. How sad.



Superman's new special powers include laser beams, super strength, and simple-chronic-halitosis.

Yes, Sonia Blade *is* sporting a thong tan line, thanks for noticing.

PS3 | **R**

Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe

This is what it's like when worlds collide

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Midway DEVELOPER: Midway Amusement Games

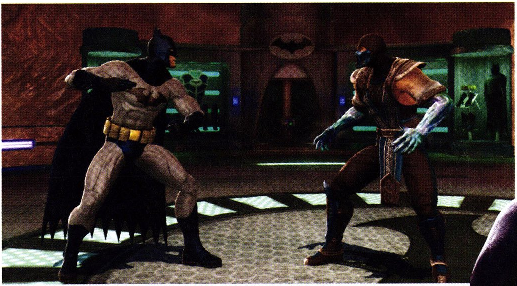
I wish like hell I had kept Russell's number.

It's 1993, the day I picked up *Mortal Kombat* from my local Egghead store, which (thankfully) sold new Sega Genesis games back then. I was out of high school, but bringing home a copy of that dastardly port of the arcade craze reawakened an outlaw sensation I hadn't felt since the days I spent blowing off school to play D&D or trying to watch the naughty bits of late night cable TV on those scrambled channels. Imagine my crushing disappointment when I booted up the game only to discover that the gore had been systematically removed, butchered out of the game! Thank god for Russell LeBash, my partner-in-gaming-crime who, a few days later, slipped me the ABACABB code to unlock all the blood-drenched delights of the game in its truest form.

Now, 16 years and dozens of sequels, ports, and re-imaginings later, *Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe* is again taking first steps. This time, onto the PS3. And again, I clutch the latest game of the series in my eager hands. I pop it into my system...and while it succeeds on many, many counts, it's egregiously missing the gore and over-the-top fatalities that defined the series since its inception.

Supanatural vs. Supaheroes

MK vs. DCU features a heavy emphasis on fighting and just enough Konquest mode-flavored



Even though we love *Mortal Kombat* mainstays like Sub-Zero, it's the DC superheroes like Batman that help the kombat feel fresh again.

Rated T for Titular. It ain't easy to look away...

story to keep the *MK* purists from spontaneously combusting over exactly why Lui Kang would want to scrub the floor with Superman, and more specifically, how exactly he would do it. Without giving anything away, I'll just say every conundrum comes down to magic, and let you figure out the how and why. The story includes two separate threads for each of the *MK* and DC casts respectively, and will keep your thumbs busy for about three hours each.

Combat-wise, all of the fighters have their own set of specific special moves, with many familiar ones returning from the *MK* combo pantheon: Lui Kang's ridiculously-voiced Bicycle Kick, Scorpion's Teleport Attack and "Get over here!" spear grab, Sonya's Kiss Of Death—they're all here. The real highlight of the game though is the DC characters and their set of special moves, which Midway has really nailed. The Flash is ridiculously fast and uses some brutally rapid-fire running attacks, Superman will wrap your ass up and hand it to you with fries and a drink, while the Joker, well, he's just full of win (you'll see why). There's also a new Rage Meter, which acts like the Star Power of fighting games; you get a momentarily increased damage, along with an awesome golden glow.

Kasual Kombat

In addition to scaling back the gore and all but removing true fatalities (you can still perform finishing moves with the *MK* cast, but the heroes are too stately for "fatal" moves; their finishers are called Heroic Brutalities), the game's difficulty seems to scale with your ass-kickery expertise. In Story mode, expect a serious challenge with each initial fight; if you lose and continue, each successive match gets a bit easier, which is good for more kasual players who might quit after losing to Sonya six times in a row, but it's bad for anyone who really wants a challenge. My advice: crank the difficulty up the highest setting if you want to test your mettle.

Help me Ed Boon, you're my only hope

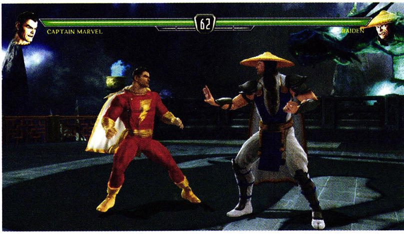
Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe offers plenty of *MK* fun, tons of combos to learn, and yes, a bundle of not-so-graphic finishing moves if you're up to mastering the dozen long combo chains. The story works well enough to explain the match-up between the two universes and keep you fighting for half a dozen hours. While the addition of multiplayer (up to two players can battle, either online or on the same system) will ensure you'll never be alone in your quest for ultimate victory. Now, if only we could have a code to turn the gore faucet back on... Where *did* I leave Russell's number?

Casey Lynch

★★★★

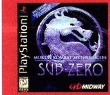
Sexy, good. Gory, bad

How come everyone from the Midway peeps to the ESRB feel that seeing someone get stabbed in the face is more damaging to young minds than admiring gravity-defying D-cups in HD? Don't get me wrong, I'm all for bouncing jubblies, but I can't help but wonder what kind of effect Catwoman's nearly bursting neckline has on teens. C'mon, if you're going to bring the sexy-time outfits, it's only fair that we can carve out Batman's spleen and serve it to Dick Grayson as well. Just sayin'.



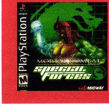
Raiden wants payback for all those confusing years he spent wondering, "Is your damn name Shazam or Captain Marvel?"

Mortal Missteps



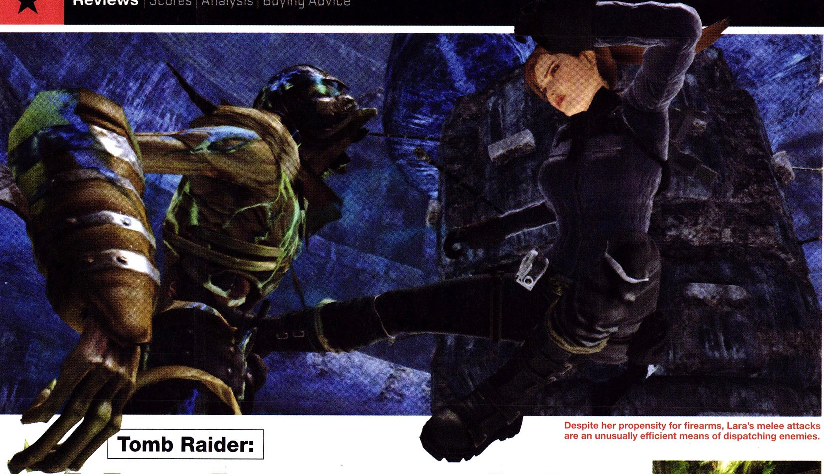
MORTAL KOMBAT MYTHOLOGIES: SUB-ZERO (PSone)

The lure of learning the backstory of everyone's favorite ice-nugget wielding ninja sounded good on paper, but man did it stink to play. Though the story was good (and plenty deep), the game's controls were its chief sin.



MORTAL KOMBAT: SPECIAL FORCES (PSone)

This title seemed doomed to fail, and Midway knew it. The publisher hedged its bets, shipping *MK: SF* with a bargain-bin price point, which did nothing to soothe the sting of its awkward overhead camera and nearly broken combat system.



Despite her propensity for firearms, Lara's melee attacks are an unusually efficient means of dispatching enemies.

Tomb Raider: Underworld

Where myth becomes legend becomes convoluted story, but you don't care

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** Eidos Interactive **DEVELOPER:** Crystal Dynamics

Isn't it strange the leeway you'll give a beautiful woman? She could just prattle on and on about her missing mother, that back-stabbing trollop Amanda, something about Thor's hammer and saving the world, and it's just *riveting.* If one of my buddies spewed that kind of drivel...well, I'd have to bust out my favorite British dysphemism: *Shut it!* But that's the reality of the world. Sometimes the sum does not equal the parts.

It's why *Tomb Raider: Underworld,* despite being the best game in the franchise, ends up being more entertaining than its imperfections suggest it rightfully deserves. Yes, graphically, *Underworld* is the series' best with lush, detailed environments, but a true standard bearer would have sweat the details (like hair and facial features) that would have completely removed the polygonal vestiges of the PSone and PS2 games from Lara's character model. Lara looks good, but she really should look better.

Lara's moves are also better than ever with an expanded range of acrobatic animations, some whose appearance still manages to surprise even several hours into the adventure. A new dual-targeting system and the ability to shoot while suspended by a single hand add new wrinkles to the gunplay as well. And yet, deaths caused by unintentionally initiated animation sequences and the imprecise tuning exhibited during fine control inputs remain part of the *Tomb Raider* legacy.

For all of Lara's star power, the environments may well be the true strength of *Underworld.* The elaborate, expansive levels are a true delight to explore and the satisfaction you feel when completing a major puzzle challenge is a palpable reminder of why the series has been such a success. There *will* be occasions when you'll be stumped during your adventures, but judicious use of the integrated hint system and the new active sonar map will usually see you through.

You might have noticed that there's hardly an aspect of *Underworld* that doesn't have a quibble attached to it. But the series eclectic mix of myth-based storyline, exotic locales, tomb raiding adventure, and yes, Lara Croft's sex appeal, combine to provide an entertainment experience above and beyond the game's technical execution. If you've ever played a *Tomb Raider* game, you know what you're in for and whether it's for you. As for me, I've got another date with Ms. Croft.

Roger Burchill

★★★★

Lacking that killer instinct? *Tomb Raider: Underworld* offers the option for Lara to disable enemies and creatures with a tranquilizer gun. How quaint.

Roger ♥s Lara

Last issue, Roger was deep in digital infatuation with *Golden Axe: Beast Rider*'s svelte newcomer, Tyris Flare. But with old flame Lara Croft back in town, he's faced with the age-old conundrum: Brunette or Redhead? As always, he consulted with Rob to elucidate his thinking:

ROGER: You see, Rob, what it really comes down to is the straddling. I was pretty impressed by Tyris and how she just *clung* on to those bucking beasts...

ROB: Stop it, Roger.

But now, Lara's got this move where she wraps herself around poles and sort of shimmies up and down...

You need help, Roger.

But Rob, it's a new addition to Lara's repertoire of moves. I *have* to keep testing it over and over—the people need to know!

I'm calling HR, right now.

Man, it's tough. But I think I've gotta go with Lara. That English accent is just so *hot.*

Well, that I concur with, but that doesn't change the fact that you are a sad, sad man, Roger.

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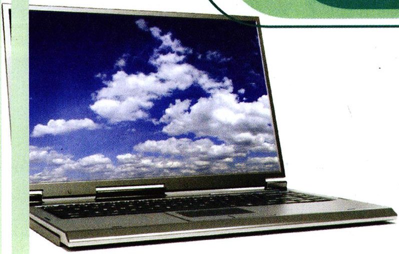

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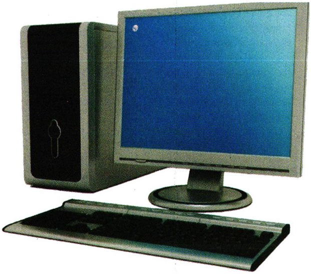

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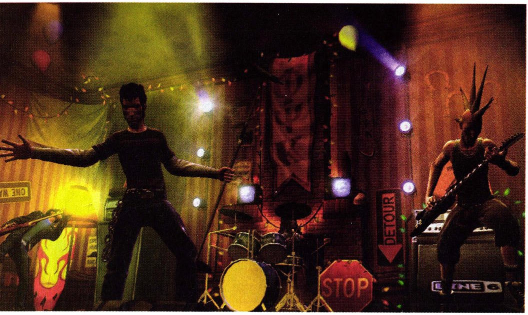
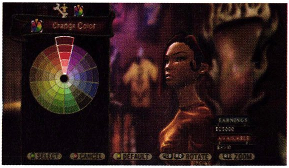
Ad provided by MediaBids.com. 1-866-236-2259.

Somehow, angry-looking dudes rocking out in a frat house really capture the game's attitude.



LINE 6
BLIZZARD
LEAD
KEYBOARD
DRUMS
Editing: Toxic Tongues

Creating a custom song requires incredible patience.



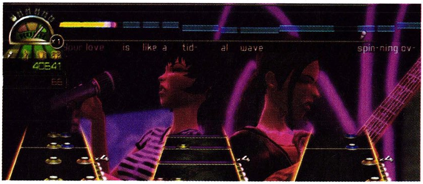
Face and guitar options? Great. Outfits and hair? Ugh.

Guitar Hero

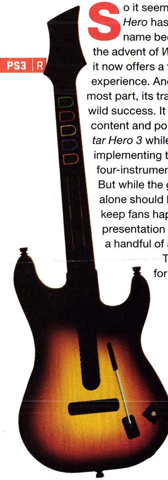
World Tour

My band could beat up your band

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 (disc only); $189.99 (disc, guitar, drums, mic) ESRB: Teen
PUBLISHER: Activision DEVELOPER: Neversoft



Very often, the character animations don't actually synch up with the music.



So it seems *Guitar Hero* has outgrown its name because, with the advent of *World Tour,* it now offers a full band experience. And for the most part, its transition is a wild success. It offers more content and polish than *Guitar Hero 3* while seamlessly implementing the new four-instrument structure. But while the gameplay alone should be enough to keep fans happy, the new presentation comes with a handful of annoyances.

The song list, for instance, is more impressive than it is fun. With artists like Van Halen, Jimi Hendrix, and Joe Satriani, it seems like it'd be hard to go wrong, but honestly, a fair number of songs are either boring or simply not fun to play. "About a Girl" by Nirvana and "Do It Again" by Steely Dan are great songs, sure, but they aren't great matches for a music game. And even the songs that do fit occasionally fall victim to contrived note charts and curious design decisions. On Expert, the game will sometimes go out of its way to make the note charts difficult, even adding extra notes when the music doesn't call for it. The charts on the easier settings tend to be better but still aren't completely accurate.

The note charts aren't the only aggravating design decision, though. The pointless celebrity cameos, heavy-handed corporate tie-ins, and painful boss battles all take the focus off of the music and make you acutely aware of the fact that you're playing a game and not, in fact, becoming a rock star. I'm sure this won't bother many of you, but for me, the lack of immersion spoils some of the fun.

Additionally, the restrictive career mode forces you to stick to a single instrument, play at least three songs (which never seem to be grouped logically) per gig, and play through an essentially linear gig list that offers little sense of progression. The highly touted music-recording suite—though intriguing—is tedious to use and yields only MIDI-quality audio. And multiplayer forces everyone to share Star Power and failure. How is that fun?

Despite these peripheral problems, the fundamental gameplay (which, naturally, constitutes the vast majority of the game) remains familiar and fun. In the end, the battle for music game dominance really boils down to personal taste. If you want a challenge, *World Tour* will still rock your world. But a joyous homage to the music you love? Not so much.

Scott Butterworth

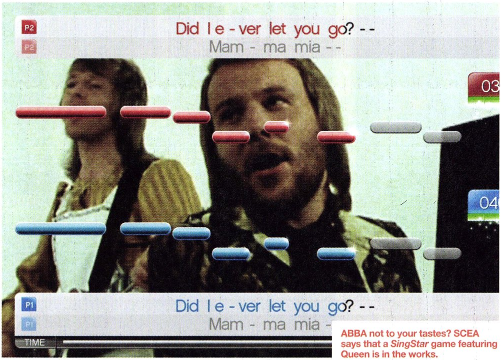
★★★½

Tools of Rock

World Tour's drum kit features six inputs (as opposed to *Rock Band's* five): three pads, two cymbals, and a foot pedal. The kit as a whole feels solid enough, the pads are quiet and responsive, and the raised cymbals definitely offer a new, slightly more challenging experience. The set isn't compatible with *Rock Band*, but it might still be worth the price for drum fans.

The guitar, on the other hand, you can skip. Yes, it's heavier and more solid than past guitars, but it just ends up feeling clunky and loud. Plus, the new "slider" on the neck is an interesting idea that didn't totally pan out and is mostly just a gimmick. If you've already got a working guitar, pass.

My favorite addition to this year's game? Bass players can now play "open notes" by hitting the strum bar without holding a fret. Cool!



ABBA not to your tastes? SCEA says that a *SingStar* game featuring Queen is in the works.

SingStar ABBA

When singing in the shower just won't do

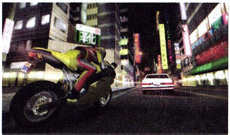
PS3 PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: SCEE London Studio

Who's going to raise a hand and own up to being an ABBA fan? But with over 370 million records sold worldwide, and the stage and movie Mamma Mia! revitalizing the musical legacy, it's clear somebody, in fact, a lot of bodies are listening. If my wife's reaction to my receipt of the review build of *SingStar ABBA* on Halloween day is any indication ("It's not Halloween, it's Christmas!"), your mom, wife, or girlfriend is going to be appropriating some major PS3 time to regale you with a seemingly endless string of Swedish soft rock hits. *Oy.*

But credit given where credit is due, SCEA's packaging of one group's library (although hardcore ABBA fans might complain about a few song omissions) on a single Blu-ray is actually more satisfying than *SingStar's* usual mishmash collection of songs. Hopefully, there will be similar collections in the future with artists that I might find more palatable, but if you're an ABBA fan, you are going to *love* this game. But just in case you're on the fence, let's take a closer look at some of the tracks...

Roger Burchill

★★★★



Race victories lead to increased cash and street rep, which lead to more upgrades and customization for your ever-expanding stable of rides.

Midnight Club L.A. Remix

The Fast and the Furiouser

PSP PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Rockstar DEVELOPER: Rockstar London

If you feel like you're channeling *Burnout Paradise* about 10 seconds into *Midnight Club L.A. Remix,* you're not alone. But whereas *Remix* might not score many originality points, it does an excellent job in gameplay execution—especially for a handheld game. *Remix* adeptly manages the considerable feat of blending over-the-top arcade-style performance with precise on-the-edge-of-control handling. Each car (or motorcycle) model possesses its own signature idiosyncrasies, but the challenge is in deciphering, and ultimately mastering them as you faceoff against rival street racers in satisfyingly large open world recreations of L.A. and Tokyo. The few drawbacks are inherent to the PSP platform: It's difficult to discern traffic in the distance due to the small screen, and the load times, while improved over *Midnight Club 3,* are still on the long side.

Roger Burchill

★★★★

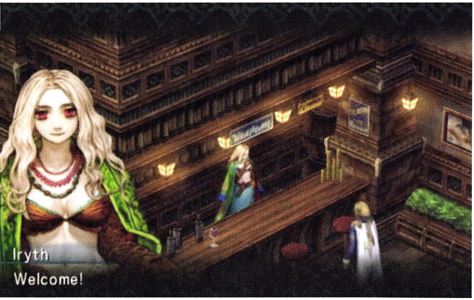
PS3 | R
PSP | R

ABBA SINGS	ROGER SPEAKS
Chiquitita	Apparently, it's not a touching ode to a banana.
Dancing Queen	Okay, I admit it, this one got me. I *am* a dancing queen.
The Day Before You Came	*It's funny, but I had no sense of living without aim, the day before you came.* Yup.
Does Your Mother Know	This is how your moms rolled, back in the day.
Fernando	Reminiscences about la revolución, not Valenzuela's screw ball.
Gimme! Gimme! Gimme!	You can practically taste the alcohol-induced desperation. Score!
Happy New Year	What? Auld Lang Syne not good enough for you?
I Do, I Do, I Do, I Do, I Do	No, I don't, I don't, I don't, I don't, I don't.
Knowing Me, Knowing You	...I'll pretend I don't mind you playing my PS3.
Money, Money, Money	Millionaire Pop Stars coveting the rich man's world. Irony!
The Name of the Game	...is cashing in with another generic ballad.
Ring Ring	For god's sake! Just call her already!
Super Trouper	*Super Troopers.* Awesome movie. Hilarious.
Take a Chance on Me	Life Lesson #62: Pass on the uber-eager chicks.
Mamma Mia	Couldn't get enough of the sing-along version at the Cinemaplex? Bring it home!
Waterloo	Okay, okay! I surrender! Just make it *stop.*
When All Is Said and Done	At...LAST! Wait, whattya mean, "Just one more song?!"
The Winner Takes It All	Can I have my PS3 back now?

07710
To the break of the day
Gim - me, gim - me, gim - me

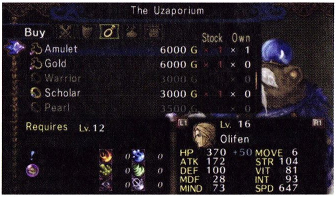
Just try to remember how many points you're racking up with your girl as you sit there listening to her sing. "You're tapping your foot, aren't you?!" Uh-oh.

PS2 *SingStar* games on PS3! Thanks to a new game update, all song tracks from PS2 *SingStar* games can be accessed via the PS3 game by swapping out the discs from the carousel screen—even on non-backwards-compatible PS3s.



Several shopkeepers offer useful services when the party's back in town. Sadly, most of them aren't as easy on the eyes as the local tavern-keeper, Iryth.

The mid-battle cutscenes are fun to watch...once. After that, though, the novelty quickly wears off.



The Uzaporium

Buy

		Stock	Own
Amulet	6000 G	× 1	× 1
Gold	6000 G	× 1	× 0
Warrior	3000 G	[illegible]	× 0
Scholar	3000 G	× 1	× 0
Pearl	3500 G	[illegible]	× 0

Requires Lv. 12

Lv. 16
Olifen

HP	370	+50	MOVE	6
ATK	172		STR	104
DEF	100		VIT	81
MDF	28		INT	93
MIND	73		SPD	647

Ahh...the Uzaporium. Remember how we used to get all our Amulets there until that large, corporate discount chain store came to town?

Eternal Poison

Yeah, it might kill you, but what a way to go

PS2 PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Atlus USA DEVELOPER: Flight Plan

Step one: Boot up this strategy-RPG in your PS2. Step two: No, not indulge in eruptions of good ol' fashioned gridlocked, turn-based battles nor even gaze upon the prettily etched bodies of the oddly attired cast. Trust me. Your next step should be to go into the options menu and toggle "Animations" off. Only by evading the long and pointless 3D cinemas that accompany every attack during combat—and more importantly, the long and pointless load times that accompany them—will you be able to enjoy this addictive, stylish SRPG.

The story and dialogue that go along with the ornate, vaguely Gothic visuals are over-dramatic. But happily, they don't take up too much space between battles—and the battling? Great fun. Besides simply knocking off your demonic opponents, if you kill them extra dead (go with me for a second here), you can make them join your fighting force. Or, for the more materialistic, you can render their bodies and souls into money, new skills, and valuable items.

Now, capturing the bad guys requires a killing blow that deals a huge amount of damage (hence the "extra dead," sort of like "deep fried" instead of just "fried"), and there are clever ways to pull that off, such as an easy-to-use system for setting up combination attacks with different members of the party. Just move one character into attack position, order them to wait, and when a second character's turn comes around they can follow right up and trigger the double team. A more direct approach works as well: The character customization system provides a lot of leeway for giving characters a wide range of attacks—even a more melee-focused fighter can have a couple of useful elemental spells attached to their weapons and equipment.

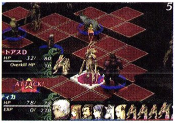
Eternal Poison is built around three separate campaigns, each with their own leading characters and unique encounters, so there's plenty of built-in replay value. But remember, your enjoyment hinges on turning off the combat animations. Boil those out and this particular dose of poison goes down remarkably smooth.

D.F. Smith

★★★½

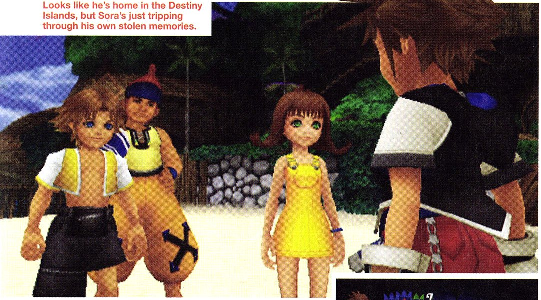
STONES OF FATE
STAGE 01
START Give Up

Done staring at Iryth? She'll happily play with your Stones...of Fate.



Snatching enemy souls and boiling them in a witch's cauldron? Fun!

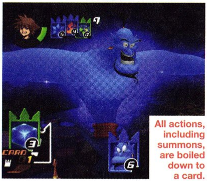
This game was called *Poison Pink* in Japan. We trust you won't have trouble making your own joke.



Looks like he's home in the Destiny Islands, but Sora's just tripping through his own stolen memories.

Kingdom Hearts Re: Chain of Memories

First, last, and only, but not necessarily in a good way

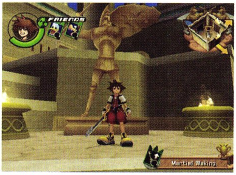


All actions, including summons, are boiled down to a card.

PS2 PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: Square Enix DEVELOPER: Square Enix

Giving your game away for free? Not a good sign. *Kingdom Hearts Re: Chain of Memories* might've been a good deal when it was a complimentary bonus in the re-release of *Kingdom Hearts II* in Japan, but it's not worth the 30 bucks you have to pay for it Stateside.

The problem with this remake of *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories*—the four year old Game Boy game that bridged the gap between *Kingdom Hearts* and its sequel—is that it fixes game elements that weren't even broken. Yes, it's 3D now, but the GBA version looked just fine the way it was. Rebuilding it using the PS2 game's engine just makes it a much more obvious retread.



Donald and Goofy are Sora's backups as always, as long as you've got their cards handy.

Meanwhile, the parts that were broken haven't changed a bit. The card-driven combat system is still maddeningly unbalanced. Nearly every move you make, down to the simple act of swinging the Keyblade at a bad guy, can easily be cancelled out by nothing more than the luck of the draw. Boss battles are painfully frustrating and slow—every time you use up all the cards in your deck of available actions, you have to pause and re-shuffle the deck to go back on the attack, and in a long fight you might go through that same cycle literally dozens of times.

Kingdom Hearts junkies may feel compelled to pick up this game regardless, just to own every single appearance of the characters they love. Though with nine years worth of games on the PS2 to choose from, those 30 dollars could go towards any number of better RPGs.

D.F. Smith

★★

Light of Day

If you missed the original *Chain of Memories*, it does fill in some interesting pieces of the *Kingdom Hearts* story. In particular, it's the first place the black-hooded members of Organization XIII ever reveal their true faces.

Yue Ying, wife of Taoist sorceror Zhuge Liang, a master archer and genius inventor.

Dynasty Warriors 6

The war goes on, and on, and *snore*

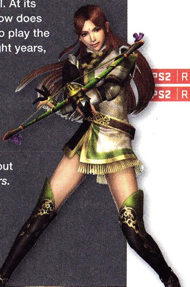
PS2 PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Koei DEVELOPER: Omega Force

The point has been made, Koei. *Dynasty Warriors 6* marks the tenth—*tenth!*—*Dynasty Warriors* game on the PS2. And that's not even counting *Samurai Warriors* or *Warriors Orochi.* We get it already!

Yes, there's the usual round of new features—a new character-building system, some cool new motion-captured 3D animations. The cinematics get about as much out of the PS2 graphically as anyone ever will. At its core, though, how does it actually feel to play the game? After eight years, the basic, gut-level hack-and-slash action hasn't changed much, and that makes it hard to keep caring about *Dynasty Warriors.*

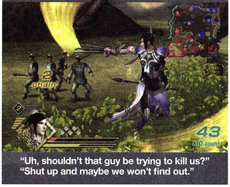
D.F. Smith

★★½

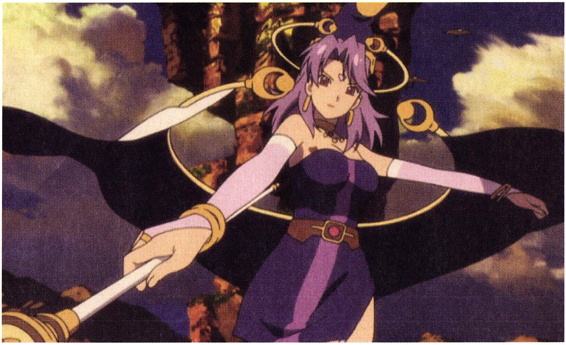


DW6 looks great, but looks only carry you so far.

PS2 | R
PS2 | R



"Uh, shouldn't that guy be trying to kill us?" "Shut up and maybe we won't find out."



Celine, a "symbologist"—or "magician" in plain English—is the first of several optional characters you can recruit.

Star Ocean:

Second Evolution

A few steps back, a few steps forward

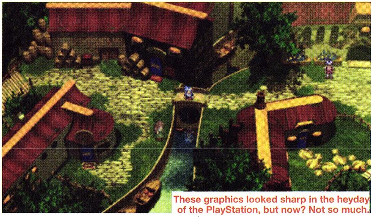
PSP PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Square Enix USA DEVELOPER: tri-Ace

Usually a sequel sports better graphics. But *Star Ocean: First Departure* was more remake than port while *Star Ocean: Second Evolution* seems more port than remake. *First Departure* got a sexy modern makeover; *Second Evolution* shows its wrinkles and age spots—it still looks a lot like it did on PSone 10 years ago.

Luckily, *Second Evolution* has a few perks in its favor. Originally, this was the second RPG from tri-Ace, the Japanese developer that started with the first *Star Ocean* and went on to make *Valkyrie Profile,* among other things. It was their first go at pre-rendered 3D background graphics, which is why it looks a little primitive now, but they were getting better at crafting a story and making a game flow smoothly around it. *Second Evolution* has a surprising amount of replay value in that department—if you'd like to try more side quests and explore different forks in the plot, you can play the whole game a second time through from the perspective of a different hero.

Even if the characters don't grab you, *Second Evolution* still has a couple of entertaining tri-Ace hallmarks. The real-time combat system is fun, like taking a break to play a good 3D beat-'em-up, and if you like a lot of number-crunching in your RPGs, there are dozens of character skills to develop as the quest goes on. Those feed into a complex item-synthesis scheme that lets an advanced party cook up all kinds of useful new equipment.

Motoi Sakuraba's music has aged better than the game's graphics, which helps make up for the garish, hard-edged backgrounds, and Square Enix did us all a favor by recording a brand-new English dub. This isn't the best game tri-Ace has ever made, but it's better than it was the first time around, and that's enough to make it an RPG worth checking out. D.F. Smith



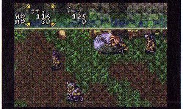
These graphics looked sharp in the heyday of the PlayStation, but now? Not so much.

★★★½

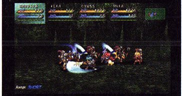
Bad Timing

The *Star Ocean* remakes have had much more work put into them than tri-Ace's first PSP revival, *Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth.* That was a quick-and-dirty port with a dated low-rent localization—these new handheld remakes have sharper graphics, more game content, superior translations, and first-rate voice acting. It's nice to see Square Enix taking more time with these projects, but it's too bad for fans of *Valkyrie Profile.* The original version was a better game than all three *Star Oceans* put together.

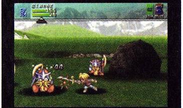
Compare and Contrast



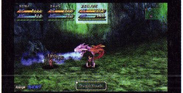
Star Ocean (Super Famicon, 1996)



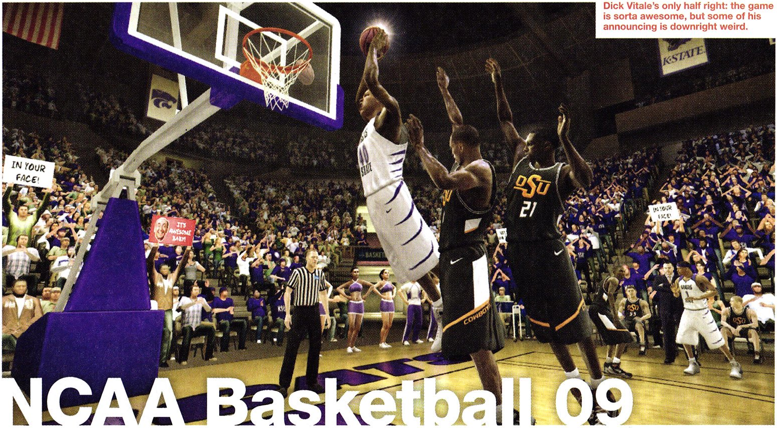
Star Ocean: First Departure (PSP, 2008) The transition from a flat background to a 3D one.



Star Ocean: The Second Story (PS1, 1998)



Star Ocean: Second Evolution (PSP, 2009) The upgrade in *Second Evolution* isn't as dramatic.



Dick Vitale's only half right: the game is sorta awesome, but some of his announcing is downright weird.

NCAA Basketball 09

Every game needs a little competition

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: Electronic Arts Canada

I feel for developers of sports games. Unlike other recurrent franchises like *Call of Duty* or *Grand Theft Auto,* your typical athletic series doesn't have the luxury of switching eras, adding harder boss encounters, or expanding the complement of weapons to accompany a mid-franchise reboot (see the sidebar for our badass list of recommended basketball overhauls). Instead, sport dev teams like the stalwarts at EA Canada rely on incorporating fancily named new features year after year, and *NCAA Basketball 09* is no different.

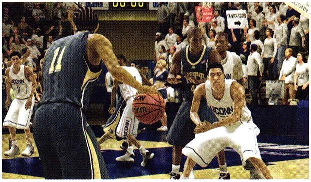
It takes a shot at the fresh-o-meter by cutting "March Madness" from its moniker and hard-pimping a…wait for it…Tempo Meter, appointing Kansas Jayhawks head coach Bill Self as your sherpa up the mountain of on-court rhythm. Essentially, each team is assigned one of three ideal tempo ratings: up-tempo, balanced, and half court. Your team performs best in its ideal tempo but switching tempos can mix things up on your opponent (like slowing down the Tar Heels, if you dare), all of which successfully changes the pace of the game.

Gameplay-wise, shooting has been simplified with a Circle button hold-and-release, which feels gimped compared to the now almost-standard analog-flipstick of most ballers. The defensive mechanics feel tight but spaced oddly when in lockdown, like there's an invisible barrier between you and the ball handler. Speaking of handling balls, Dick Vitale outdoes himself with some obviously unintentional but amusing innuendos like, "He unloads," "Great job packing it in," and "Coming inside." Fancy features and pillow talk aside, games flow well, character models look and move convincingly, and the presentation is top notch (stay with the Broadcast or Floor camera, the others can throw off your depth of field).

Still, there's nothing brand-defining here; a college version of the D-League storyline progression in *NBA 09: The Inside* would have been perfect. Maybe it's a lack of competition (2K Sports opted out of college licensing for a *2K9* release, benching its *College Hoops* series), or maybe it's just a rebuilding year, but *NCAA Basketball 09* fails to achieve absolute must-buy status, even if it is the only collegiate ticket in town this year.

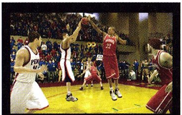
Casey Lynch

★★★½



#11 could have been so much more in our hands, but with no superstar or story mode, he's just #11.

Don't bother creating a player. Don't believe us? Set a player's weight at 400 lbs. and watch what happens: nothing!



Send more players!!!!

Supa-rad Basketball

Basketball games on my wish list:

ZOM B-BALL Like *Call of Duty: World at War*'s crossover Zombie Mode, imagine a five-on-five game of hoops facing a team of the undead.

CHOCOBO HORSE Screw polo, we wanna drain threes from downtown while atop everyone's favorite yellow bipeds.

PORTAL DUNK Throw yourself through the air with your portal gun to dunk the Weighted Companion Cube, while avoiding turrets and pools of acid. And GLaDOS. WIN.

This would be a triumph. I'm making a note here. Huge success.

WORLD BUILDING

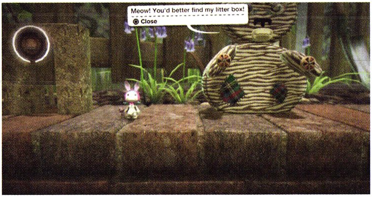
LITTLE**BIG**REVIEWS

What makes a good *LittleBigPlanet* level? With so many options and a blank canvas, deciphering where to start (and where to end) can be as much of a challenge as the actual building itself. While LittleBigWorkshop provides a ton of advice on practical matters surrounding your own level construction, we had Media Molecule designer Jim Unwin run the rule over two levels created here at PTOM Towers: one by Qore host Veronica Belmont, the other by GamesRadar's Mikel Reparaz. Our instructions: be brutally honest. What's good, what's bad, what we should do, what we should fix. (Both levels are available for download right now).

qore

Presented by the PLAYSTATION Network

KITTIES **GOTTA GO!**

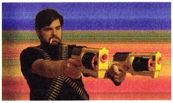


Meow! You'd better find my litter box!

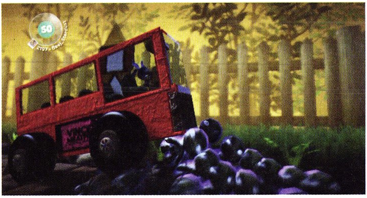
Close

It has a story, which is a great start for any level. Much like a story it has a beginning, a middle, and an end. And the cat was great too; that voice never fails to make me laugh.

games radar



SMILE-TIME **APOCALYPSE**



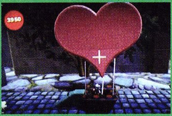
A great atmospheric opening, the burning trees make for a very evocative image.

LBP on YouTube

Sometimes, too much freedom is overwhelming. Too many choices, and suddenly you're stuck, not sure how to even begin. Add in a crazy—and at first, direction-less—imagination and you might be afraid you'll never make anything worthwhile in *LBP*. Check out our favorite *LBP* levels on YouTube if you need a little inspiration to get you started. (You might not find some of these in-game, for intellectual property reasons at press time several levels were being pulled by Sony's moderators.)

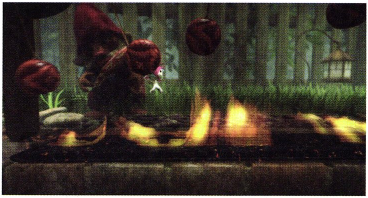
Little Big Planet
Tetris Completed Version
By: churchill378 (PSN ID: Cellmember)
Who knew Tetris could be so…perilous.

Little Big Planet – To Zanarkand Theme
By: Kama151
It's just music, but ah, such a sweet, sweet melody.



Little Big Planet: Love and Marriage
(Engagement Proposal)
By: Jed05 (PSN ID: DimmuJed)
There's a story behind this one, and it'll make you go "Aww!"

KITTIES **GOTTA GO!**

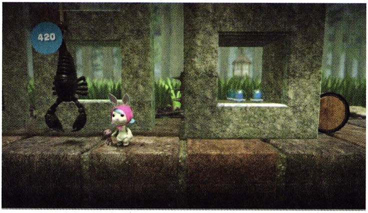


The swinging section is a great opener, especially with the camera angle. Nothing like some classic *LBP* gameplay.

However, there are some unexplained elements. The flaming forest floor makes for a great gameplay device but would be even more satisfying for the player if it was given a reason. For instance "the criminal crook who stole or poor kitty's tray set fire to the floor to cover his tracks!" Little tricks like this don't require big changes but make for a more memorable experience.

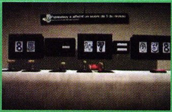
Some music would have been nice too.

Moving on, what is that small yellow arrow for? I spent ages trying to follow it, using the nearby block of sponge to try and jump on top of the concrete block but to no avail. I'm guessing there is no point, so why tease then frustrate me?



The scorpions again could be made more satisfying with a little bit of story. Something like: "The dastardly devil went through the creepy cave to try and put you off. Are you, little Sackperson, brave enough to follow them?"

This second section would also have been the perfect opportunity to vary the scenery a little. Remember your levels can go up and down just as easily as you write left to right. Make Sackboy climb a mountain before you plunge him into a cave!



Little Big Planet: Little Big Computer
By: upsilandre (PSN ID: Upsilandre)
First moment of awe: realizing the calculator *works*. Second moment: finding out *how*.

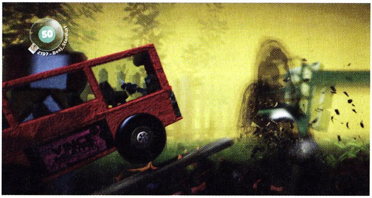
Other videos we recommend:

Littlebigplanet Dragon in the Sky (Jewishspidey, PSN ID: LBP4TW)

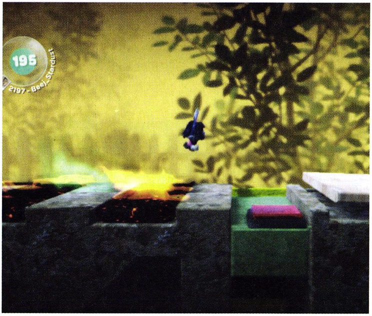
LittleBigPlanet – "Hollow Bastion" (Glihihi)

LittleBigPlanet – The Human Body Level (TheReturnofDogen, PSN ID: jjmusicman)

SMILE-TIME **APOCALYPSE**

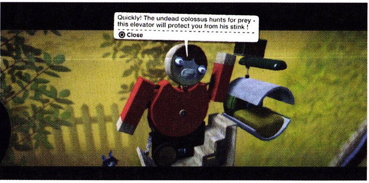


Starting with the first fallen building, there is a handful of stuff throughout the level where the design seems to fight with the game's core principles. For instance, whatever you think of the auto-z, it is here to stay. If you work with the game it makes for a more fun experience for the player. Don't fight it, feel it!



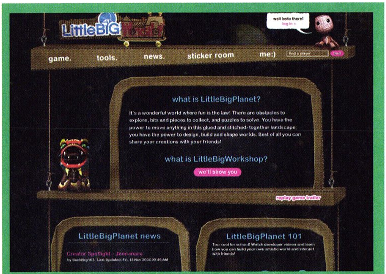
The shopping mall interlude made me smile; the change of music really makes a massive difference here. Bravo!

The vertical jumping section afterward was incredibly frustrating. Again, it seems to fight against how the game actually works. Instead you could have made the jumps slightly easier but perhaps used score bubbles so the player is rewarded for doing the section well by getting a decent multiplier and lots of lovely points.



Quickly! The undead colossus hunts for prey - this elevator will protect you from his stink !

Same again for the glass platforms at the foot of the behemoth. Only the most masochistic of gamers will get a kick out of that, the rest of us will just get annoyed!



what is LittleBigPlanet?

It's a wonderful world where fun is the law! There are obstacles to explore, bits and pieces to collect, and puzzles to solve. You have the power to move anything in this glued and stitched- together landscape; you have the power to design, build and shape worlds. Best of all you can share your creations with your friends!

what is LittleBigWorkshop?

we'll show you

LittleBigPlanet news

Creator Spotlight - Jemi-maru

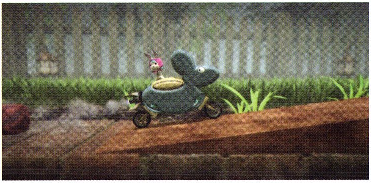
by SackBoy103 Last Updated: Fri, 14 Nov 2008 09:46 AM

LittleBigPlanet 101

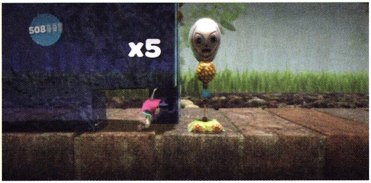
Too cool for school! Watch developer videos and learn how you can build your own artistic world and interact with friends!

A LittleBigWorkshop It's not just a game website, it's a treasure trove of *LBP* goodies! The LittleBigWorkshop **(http://www.littlebigworkshop.com/en-us/)** features user made tutorials, level videos, and other art for you to admire and pick up valuable tips. If you're in a creative mood, toy with some *LBP* stickers or design your own *LBP* level in the blueprint creator. And of course, news and forums are a staple. Sign into the site with your PSN ID to upload your own content, too!

KITTIES **GOTTA GO!**

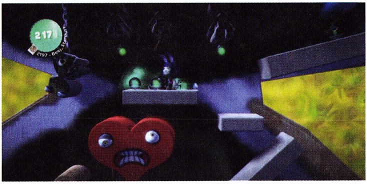


I loved the rocket-powered mouse, so cute! But with both the mouse and the balloon it is very easy to get yourself into a position where the mouse has crashed, the balloon has floated away, and you are trapped with no option but to restart the level. Learning *emitters* can be a bit of an uphill struggle but they are very powerful, and perfect for resetting elements like this if the player screws up.

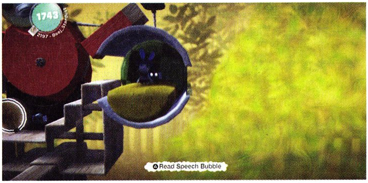


These are things that can be ironed out by playtesting. One of the best ways we found of doing this was to get a friend to play the level and just watch them. Don't speak, don't point, don't tense. It can be really surprising how things you imagined were easy in your head can be entirely confusing for somebody new.

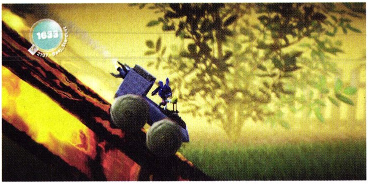
SMILE-TIME **APOCALYPSE**



The scale of the giant zombie is great though. I loved little touches like the tears you swing from. Perhaps you could have used camera zones to really emphasis the scale? Tipping the camera up to begin with, then pulling it further out to show how small Sackboy is in relation to this massive foe.



But, after all of that there isn't much of a reward. I'm not sure I understood the story about the girl, and where are my points?! In Kitties Gotta Go for instance the same character that sent you on the quest congratulates you at the end, and all of a sudden you've played through a story.



The easiest way of indentifying stuff like this is to get your friends to play through it. Or if you have no friends (aw!) then get online and ask people to playtest your level. It can be disheartening hearing bad feedback about your level, but a thick skin and the ability to listen to advice will improve your level tenfold. All the MM levels that came on the disc have been played and altered and played and altered hundreds of times. And of course, when you find a section or idea that works (or a motif as we call them) you can reuse and adapt them time and time again.

Keep Checking Back! New costumes and other goodies are released on a regular basis, so keep checking the PlayStation Store for the latest paid and free *LBP* downloadable content!

Give PlayStation: The Official Magazine

This Holiday Season

PlayStation 3 · PlayStation Portable · PlayStation Network · PlayStation 2
PlayStation
The Official Magazine
AUGUST 08
EXCLUSIVE
LittleBIG Planet
Don't Be Alarmed! Sackboy just wants to take over the planet!
See inside the creative world that EVERY PS3 owner will play
First Details QUANTUM OF SOLACE
Play as the coolest ever JAMES BOND!
HANDS-ON IMPRESSIONS
RESISTANCE 2
MADDEN NFL 09
WWE SMACKDOWN VS RAW 2009
GTA4
Free Modes! Top picks to spice up your online game
Exclusive Hands-on with crossover brawler
MORTAL KOMBAT VS DC UNIVERSE
Batman vs. Sub-Zero
Superman vs. Scorpion
Flash vs. Sonya Blade
PlayStation 3 · PlayStation Portable · PlayStation Network · PlayStation 2
PlayStation
The Official Magazine
JULY 08
METAL GEAR SOLID 4
GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS
TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION
WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW
Never-before-revealed DETAILS
NEW LOCATIONS unveiled
The definitive word on the PS3's defining SYSTEM-SELLER
18 PREVIEWS
FALLOUT 3
LEGO BATMAN
AND MORE...
SILENT HILL HOMECOMING
THE MOST DISTURBING PREVIEW EVER!
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Future

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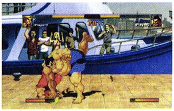
- **NAY** No legs, no fun, no value.

Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix

PRICE: $14.99 **DEVELOPER:** BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT

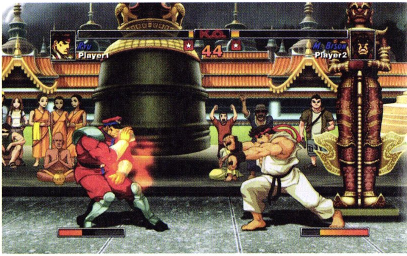
+ The obscene number of adjectives in the title is warranted. Sure, this is basically the same old *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* that many of us pumped full of quarters nearly 15 years ago, but this version feels… definitive. You know that thing you always wanted in a *Street Fighter* game, whatever it is? Yeah, it's in here. And it's done right.



Player1
77
Player2

Let's start with the obvious: the new visuals are gorgeous, thanks to the crisp 1080p resolution. Every single piece of art has been masterfully redrawn, yet the characters (all 17) and stages remain immediately recognizable. It's easy to feel like this is how the game was always intended to look. And purists need not be afraid. Not only is the original code still running underneath all the fancy new graphics, but you can even revert back to the pixel-tastic versions of the characters.

In fact, despite some welcome upgrades to nearly every aspect of the game, going retro is almost always an option. The game features a slightly rebalanced version of the original that plays beautifully, but "classic" mode still appears front and center in the game select menu. The music, too, has been brilliantly remixed, but guess what? All the old songs are still in there. And the traditional 4:3 aspect ratio? Well, you get the idea.



Really, customization is *SSF2THDR's* greatest strength. You can adjust everything from the number of rounds to the game speed to the controller setup. There's even a Dip Switch Settings menu that allows you to customize specific aspects of individual moves. If you had a pet peeve about the original or thought a move particularly cheap, chances are you can change it. Even the online mode offers a wealth of options and features. Vigorous stat tracking, eight-player tournaments, voice chat—it's all here.

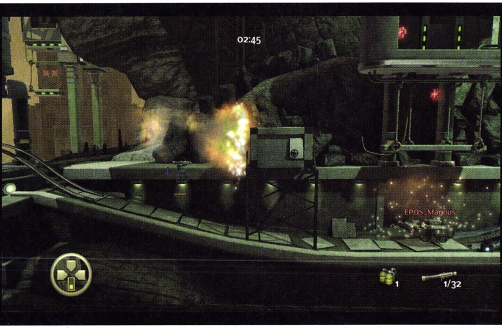
Hyperbolic as it sounds, this is quite possibly the best all-around version of one of the most important (and fun!) fighting games of all time. Everyone should play a little *Street Fighter* at some point, and this is an excellent way to experiece it. Scott

Coming Soon

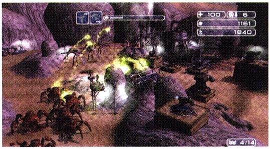
Crash Commando

AVAILABLE: Winter **DEVELOPER:** EPOS Game Studios

Jet packs? Tanks? Multi-tiered levels with interactive turrets, rockets, and secret tunnels? *Crash Commando* might sound somewhat like the typical online shooter, but now take into consideration that it's a sidescroller, with a camera zoomed way back (reminiscent of the game *Worms)* and tiny figures blasting the hell out of each other as they duck through tunnels, plant C4, and fire rocket launchers as they soar through the air. The controls are decidedly unintuitive (left analog to move, right analog to aim, R1 to shoot, L1 to jump/jetpack), though easy enough to learn. I was only able to test the game against bots, but the experience was quick, fun, and satisfying. Here's hoping that it'll be even better when up to 12 people are playing online. Teresa



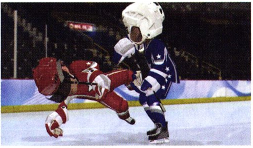
PSN PREVIEWS



Savage Moon

AVAILABLE: Winter **DEVELOPER:** FluffyLogic

Spy a spider in the corner: My reaction is to start, whimper, then rush out of the room, hollering for someone else to get rid of it. I hate bugs. They scare me. But if you hand me a bazooka, that's a different story. I could probably pull the trigger before the spider managed to jump out of its corner and tear my face off (I told you they scare me). So *Savage Moon* was a real treat. When I encountered hordes of spiders, worms, scorpions, and other creepy crawlies (in hi-def, too, ugh!), I didn't have to deal with them personally. No, my rows upon rows of strategically placed machine gun, anti-air, mortar, and laser towers handled them for me. Thus far, this PSN exclusive tower defense game offers a host of strategic options—from deciding what types of towers to research to choosing whether to sacrifice tower strength for more currency—as well as a freely maneuverable 3D camera. Whether the variety of enemies and towers are balanced, however, remains to be seen. But I have to admit, watching those alien critters get blasted to pieces makes me smile. Teresa



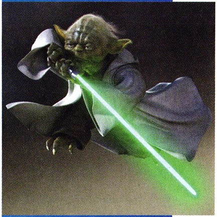
3 on 3 NHL Arcade

AVAILABLE: February 2009 **DEVELOPER:** Electronic Arts Canada

Harkening back to the glory days of skinny guy, medium guy, fat guy hockey (no, we're not talking about the PTOM staff, but *Ice Hockey* for the NES), *3 on 3 NHL Arcade* looks to offer a fun, fast-paced alternative to the simulation-focused mainline hockey franchises. A representative sample of 40 top NHL players offers a link to real-world hockey, but the gameplay is anything but realistic. Absent are rules, penalties, or even game-interrupting whistles, play is constant and manic. Tweaks to the physics-based checking engine from *NHL 09* mean that checks are huge, sometimes resulting in players being propelled the length of the ice. Opt to play with power-ups and you can access attributes including speed skating and giant goalie. With six-player offline and three-player online play, the PTOM staff will be divvying up for teams soon—guess who's the fat guy. Roger

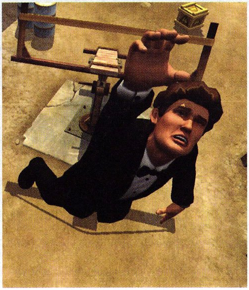
WHAT'S IN STORE

Our favorite downloads from the PlayStation Store this month:



SOULCALIBUR IV: YODA ADD-ON

Okay, at $4.99, this little green Jedi ain't cheap. But if you've ever dreamed of pitting Vader against Yoda, here's your chance. You know you've gotta have it.

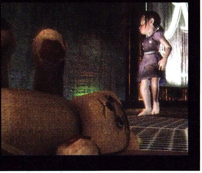


Hassle the Hoff in Pain: Movie Studio Lot

Don't ask why. Just accept it. If you're willing to plop down $1.99, you can have your very own David Hasselhoff (fully-voiced by him) to torture as you please in *PAIN.* If you need a new playground, you can pick up the *PAIN: Movie Studio Lot* as well, for $5.99, though the Hoff can be punished equally as well in any of the earlier environments.

BioShock DLC

Even if you're the type to gleefully, sadistically harvest every Little Sister in *BioShock,* you'll still get a thrill rescuing the precious darlings that populate the standalone missions in this new, PS3-exclusive DLC. For $9.99, you get three full-featured puzzle levels that will test your mind as well as your might. In one mission, you're tasked with rescuing a Li'l Sis stranded atop a broken-down Ferris wheel. The goal: electrify the control panel to move the wheel. The challenge: you don't have all your plasmids or weaponry readily available, so you'll have to search around for ammo, upgrades, or creative ways to move the wheel one position at a time. In another level, you'll find yourself in a central hub with various challenge rooms radiating out, each one presenting you with both a puzzle and a combat test. We've promised not to spoil the third room, but what we can report is that this self-contained DLC also includes its own set of Trophies, along with an additional goal of finding the hidden roses. The entire experience will clock in at three to five hours—a solid value for anyone who owns the game.



Letters

Feedback, insight, flamewars, and real wars

> "If you tick us off with your belligerence and stupidity, simply know that we will turn your good times into bad times."

TOP 6 GAMES THAT DON'T EXIST YET

About half of the letters we get here at PTOM are nothing more than demands for information about random games. Often times, these games don't actually exist (yet). Here are our favorites that you want to know more about…but nothing yet exists:

- *SLY COOPER 4*
- *HAZE 2*
- *LAIR 2*
- *GENJI: DAYS OF THE BLADE 2*
- *MARVEL UNIVERSE ONLINE*
- *XIII 2*

OH, THE HORROR

Sorry guys, but for once I have to disagree with one of your reviews. And it saddens me dearly to do so. You gave 4.5 stars to a game with a major flaw: *Silent Hill: Homecoming,* a game I was and STILL am anxious to play. The *Silent Hill* franchise has always been a favorite of mine and I have enjoyed every game in the series, until now. And that's quite simply because I can't f*@king play the game! It's not because I'm 13 and my parents won't allow it; in fact, I'm 38. No, my frustration lies in the controls and the lack of the included ability to invert the Y-axis. *Aaaaaaaggghhhhhhh!!* How <insert explicative here> hard would it have been to put that in the game? Sure, once you get the handgun you have that option for aiming, but why can't I control the camera the same way?

People's brains work in different ways. That's why almost every other game on the market includes the option to switch the controls to suit what's best for you. Not this game, however. I'm trying my best to be patient with it, but it has seriously taken all the fun out of it. Kinda like playing *Guitar Hero* without the guitar controller.

My hope is that you guys will print this or SEND IT OVER TO KONAMI so that they may include a downloadable patch in the future to give me the option to invert the Y-axis for the camera controls. The VERY NEAR future! Cause there are way too many eagerly anticipated GREAT games coming out in the next few months and I don't want to completely lose this one in the shuffle.

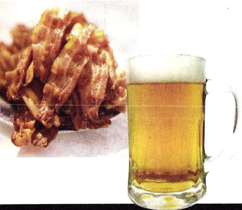
Kenny Sanford, via email

Kenny raises an interesting point that we'd love to hear more about from all our readers: What control quirks in games bug you the most? Be specific, and send your emails to PTOM_letters@futureus.com. (Mark the subject "Out of Control.") We'll compile the best and run them in a future issue. We're sure the developers will read it, and never, ever, ever again commit such egregious errors. Because that's how the world works.

RANDOM QUOTE FROM A CANADIAN EMAIL WE WON'T BE RUNNING (This joke just won't die.)

"I feel really bad that all the Canadians that email you guys never give you bacon and/or beer, so I decided to give you a picture of bacon and beer. Also you guys make a great magazine. I'm Canadian."

—Joe Garet, Canada



LETTER OF THE MONTH

CALL OF DUTY: ASS CLOWN KILLERS

In your November issue, Erich Holden bemoans the fact that glitchers, cheaters, hackers and teamkillers have run afoul of all the games he loves. I just want him to know that one clan is fighting the good fight against these denizens that we hate so much. My clan has dubbed these fools and idiots "Ass Clowns." We are a group of like-minded grunts that enjoy making life miserable for said gaming heathens. We DO NOT tolerate any of their crap! So, in late 2004, during the dawn of *Call of Duty: Finest Hour,* the ASS CLOWN KILLERS were born.

Yes, our tactics are brutish, rude, and usually go well beyond the borders of tactfulness. However, through gaming skill and biting, rapier wit, we succeed in changing the balance of power, one match at a time.

You see, my dear Erich, these tools don't care if they wreck your good times, so it is up to loud-mouthed braggarts like the ASS CLOWN KILLERS to pester, belittle, and bully these intellectual midgets into leaving our games and making room for those that DO enjoy having a fun gaming experience. When they realize our resolve to ruin their attempts at bothering us, they simply back down like lame cowards. Their "flames" lose their spark.

Don't get me wrong: ACK is not about being an online lynch mob. Leave us be and enjoy a great battle with some great guys and gals. We are here for a good time, too! It's the way we prefer it. But if you tick us off with your belligerence and stupidity, simply know that we will turn your good times into bad times.

So lift your head up, Erich, and dream of a day when the online community is Ass Clown free. Until then, you will find the ACK doing what it does best: Making Ass Clowns miserable.

ACK_MINDSEYE (Archie Harpell), Kingston, Ontario

It's a new day, one full of hope: for a new economy, for a new direction for this country…for an end to online ass clownery. Thanks to Archie for his valiant efforts. Now, dear readers, what are *you* gonna do to make the world a better place? Let us know at PTOM_Letters@futureus.com.

ABOUT FACE

One of my favorite sections of PTOM is the page right before the reviews. I enjoy reading the little blurbs about whatever theme you choose every month. Also thanks to those drawings of each of the editors, I had a pretty good idea (or so I thought) of what you guys look like. Other than seeing Rob at a gametrailers interview about *MGS4,* I had not seen anyone else's real face.

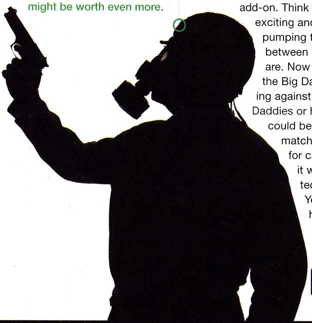
Then, in the latest episode of Qore, I was surprised and pleased to see most of you in the holiday buyer's guide. Well, after seeing the drawings and your real faces, I gotta say they're not too close to each other, and I like your drawings better. (Except for Teresa, whose drawing doesn't do justice to her real face.) Please don't take offense; it's just an interesting observation.

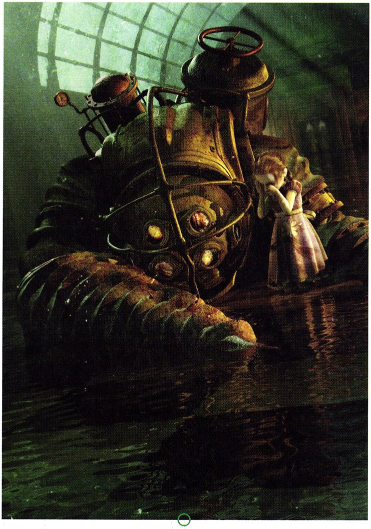
Oscar R. Benavides, Las Vegas

I loved the Holiday Gift Guide in your last issue, but I couldn't help wonder what you *really* look like, since you were all in shadows and the only other pictures of you guys (and gal—hi, Teresa!) are drawings. Then I saw you all in the Qore holiday roundup—well, all except Roger. So what does Roger look like? And why is he such a mystery?

Ben Tuculo, San Anselmo, CA

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. We think this candid snapshot of Roger might be worth even more.





SHOCKINGLY AWESOME

So I've ordered *BioShock* and I have a shockingly (yes, pun intended) good idea for a future add-on. Think about how exciting and adrenaline-pumping those fights between a Big Daddy are. Now imagine *being* the Big Daddy and fighting against either other Big Daddies or humans. That could be the deathmatch mode. Now, for capture the flag, it would be "protect the sister." You can believe how awesome I am now. As a reward I will accept my T-shirt and cookies.

"barnacle310," via email

Awesome idea, indeed. So awesome, in fact, that no T-shirt can contain your awesomeness, and no cookie would be sweet enough to satisfy your awesome hunger.

HOT DOGS THAT SHOOT LIGHTNING

So I have heard about the pure awesomeness constantly emanating from you guys. I was wondering if you can channel your pure awesomeness through your fingertips and create lightning or hot dogs or something?

"Professor Goatleg," via email

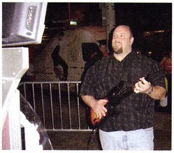
We can't do any such thing, but we're pretty sure barnacle310 (above) could pull it off. Have you heard? He's awesome.

The Guitar Hero: World Tour Launch Party

Ignoring the throng of A-list red carpet celebrities, we went straight to you, the gaming community, while you rocked at *Guitar Hero* stations, waiting for the game's midnight release.

GUITAR HERO
BEST BUY

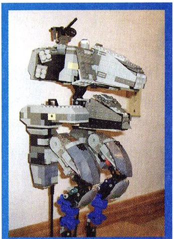
Music games bring strangers together, as evidenced by this ensemble of plastic instrument musicians. Sisters Julie (vocals) and Shawna (guitar, playing on Expert mode!), with Jose (drums) and Alexander (bass).



Michael, proud two-year owner of a PS3, beams when he explains that his favorite game is *Resistance,* but the real reason he loves his PS3? "Blu-ray movies," he says. Go figure.

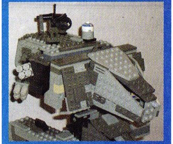
Our own Teresa Dun takes a shot at beating "Ramblin' Man" by The Allman Brothers Band on Expert difficulty. Ha! Not happening.

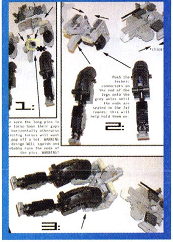
Send your thoughts and comments to PTOM_letters@futureus.com. And keep sending us your PSP photos as well. Because we say so.



LEGO METALGEAR

Forget fan art: 15-year-old PTOM reader Shane Palmer focuses his creative energy on something a bit more constructive—LEGO. The Arizona teen combined his love for *Metal Gear* and plastic bricks to build his very own version of the Gekko. Why this particular item? "I wanted to build it for the challenge, because making robots is one of the hardest things to do with LEGOs." The project took him about four weeks, during which he studied both the in-game model and the concept art, then built the Gekko in stages. To find all the right pieces, he scoured various sets, including Bionicles, which he used for the legs. Shane has also built the Tower of Babel from *Final Fantasy IV* and the *Metal Gear* Rex. "I'm currently working on a model of Shadow Moses from *MGS1*," he tells us. "I build videogame models to help me with my future of computer modeling. I hope to attend college to study game design."





FINALLY FANTASY

What is the big deal about the *Final Fantasy* series? I love videogames. They have been my favorite hobby for as long as I can remember, and one game that I have always heard of is *Final Fantasy.* I have never played a *Final Fantasy* game before. So what is the big deal? I hear they are the greatest games ever (so please don't send a ninja to my house to kill me for asking this). Also, please, I am begging you to expand your letter section! It is one of my favorite sections. I just love it. I wish it was two full pages front and back. But for some weird reason, in your Holiday '08 magazine the letters section was REALLY short. Why was that? Can you please (I AM ON MY HANDS AND KNEES HERE!!!) expand your letters section.

Alex van der Colff, via email

Why is *Final Fantasy* such a big deal? Well, there are big swords. Like, *really* big swords. And giant birds you can ride! Also, the series totally set the standard for JRPGs and continues to serve as enduring example of the storytelling power of videogames. Seriously, go try one or we *will* send our in-house ninja! As for our Letters section, check it out! We added a third page *just for you.* Here at PTOM, we like to bludgeon you with kindness every now and then. Don't say we never did nothin' for ya.

CONSOLE WHORES

I want to lover my PS3. I really do. Considering I'm on my third Xbox 360 system and still my first PS3, I'd love to go over to Sony's far better built machine. The problem is there's not much reason for me to. I own over 30 Xbox games, and only five PS3 games. All exclusives. When a game is cross platform there's absolutely no incentive to pick up the PS3 version over the Xbox one when they are exactly the same in every regard, and then the Xbox version has Achievements. I thought this would change with the implementation of Trophies but it really hasn't. It's been out for a while now and there's only about a dozen or so games that support them. That's pathetic. Why hasn't Sony made them mandatory like Microsoft has with the Xbox? I'm sure tons of other people on the fence of which version to buy would pick the PS3 version if it had trophies in it. I certainly would. As long as Sony makes it optional, developers won't bother adding them.*Michael Pimentel, via email*

Heh, "lover"...anyways, that's a fair question, Michael. Why doesn't Sony make Trophies mandatory? Well, you have to remember that games these days typically take two years or more to develop. Since the Trophy system was introduced just five months ago, many of this holiday's big titles were too far along for trophies to suddenly be thrown in. It would have meant delays or worse, rush jobs. But rest assured, as we move forward, you'll start to see more and more games with Trophies. Will Sony ever make it mandatory? Probably not. But in all likelihood, they won't have to.

MAN OF MYSTERY

Dear PTOM staff I just wanted to write a pretty long run-on sentence to see if you guys would print it and junk because your magazine is pretty cool but not too cool or else I probably wouldn't read it and your magazine needs women with larger breast diameters and larger posterior circumferences but not too large or my eyes will start bleeding and I feel like you guys don't appreciate my purchases every month so if you guys add my letter I'll be pretty happy but not too happy or else I'll get pretty angry again and start beating my stupid red ring of death Xbox again and then go hug my pretty shiny PS3 but not too shiny or else I won't be able to read this letter when you guys print it and I'm not telling you my real name until I see this letter.

Frank Jaeger, via email

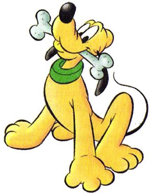
Dear "Frank Jaeger" we just wanted to thank you for your letter but we thought we'd mention that your email account automatically attaches your name to the subject line of your emails so we actually already know your real name (Armando) but hey, nice try and good luck with those bleeding eyes.

Famous Bodies

Congrats to Trevor Long for identifying all three mystery items on our Reviews Intro page in the Holiday issue. Trevor wasn't the only reader to identify them correctly, but he was the first to explain why they're all there. Here's what he said:

Tera Patrick, 5 stars, legendary
2008 Saturn Vue, 2.5 stars, mediocre
Pluto, .5 star, broken

What do they have in common? Nothing by face value, but by name (in reverse order)...

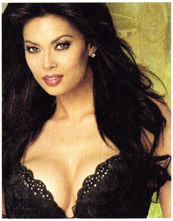


½

Pluto, the heavenly body that was once a planet, but now isn't. Championed by Sackboy, this chunk of matter doesn't meet the criteria of being a planet. So, broken.

★★½

Saturn, kind of not a planet but really it is. A gas giant that has some cool jewelry but is basically just kind of "meh" since you can't possibly ever hope to visit up close. (At least you could technically land on Pluto.)



★★★★★

Earth, or Terra (a homonym for Tera, another heavenly body, heh), is where we all hang our hats. Easily the best of all things that this solar

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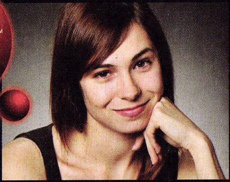
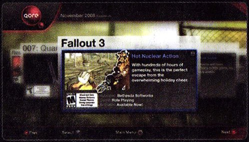


Qore host Veronica Belmont



November 2008

007: Quar

Fallout 3

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Bethesda Softworks

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Qore's Holiday Gaming Guide

QORE EPISODE 06

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From Japan to the Palm Desert, the Qore team is traveling to all corners of the gaming world to bring you the best coverage you can find on the games and PlayStation products you want to know about the most. Join us, for Episode 06.

PlayStation Home – There's No Place Like It!
Veronica joins Jack Buser, director of PlayStation Home, for an exclusive in-world tour of the 3D social gaming community that everyone is going to want to join.

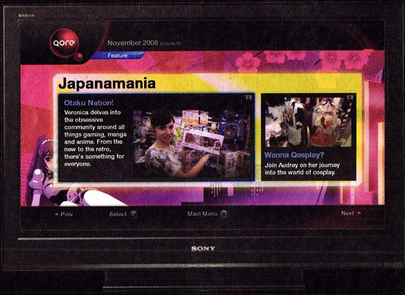
Qore's Holiday Gaming Guide
With a cornucopia of game choices this year for the PlayStation 3, how do you know what to buy for your loved ones? Or what should you ask for? The editors at *PlayStation: The Official Magazine* give us their expert opinions on nine games shipping in October and November that would look really great on any gift list.

Japanamania!
The Qore gang travels to the Far East to report on the gaming culture in Tokyo and take us to a few of their favorite haunts, including Audrey playing dress up at a Cosplay hot spot and Veronica taking in the sights at the amazing Yodobashi Camera.

Need for Speed: Undercover
The venerable series is back and it's asking you to go deep undercover in a car smuggling operation. This plotline begs the eternal question: Can you win enough races to keep from blowing your cover?

Check out the "What's Hot" section for Audrey Cleo's roundup of the top Blu-ray releases in November and her exclusive look behind the scenes at the *MotorStorm: Pacific Rift* TV commercial shoot 15,000 feet above the Palm Desert.

Japanamania!



November 2008

Feature

Japanamania

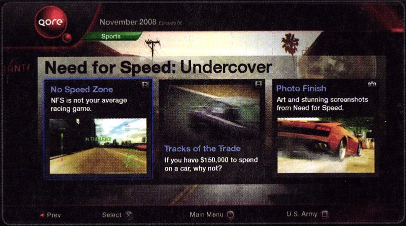
Otaku Nation!

Veronica delves into the obsessive community around all things gaming, manga and anime. From the new to the retro, there's something for everyone.

Wanna Qosplay?

Join Audrey on her journey into the world of cosplay.

Need for Speed: Undercover



November 2008

Sports

Need for Speed: Undercover

No Speed Zone

NFS is not your average racing game.

Tracks of the Trade

If you have $150,000 to spend on a car, why not?

Photo Finish

Art and stunning screenshots from Need for Speed.

Photography by Mark Madeo

TO REDEEM YOUR CODE: It's now even easier with the Firmware 2.50 update. On the PlayStation Network tab, select Account Management, then select Redeem Codes from the all-new menu.

Enter the code below into the three boxes, then select Continue. Now hit Continue and Accept the download. Sit back and enjoy!

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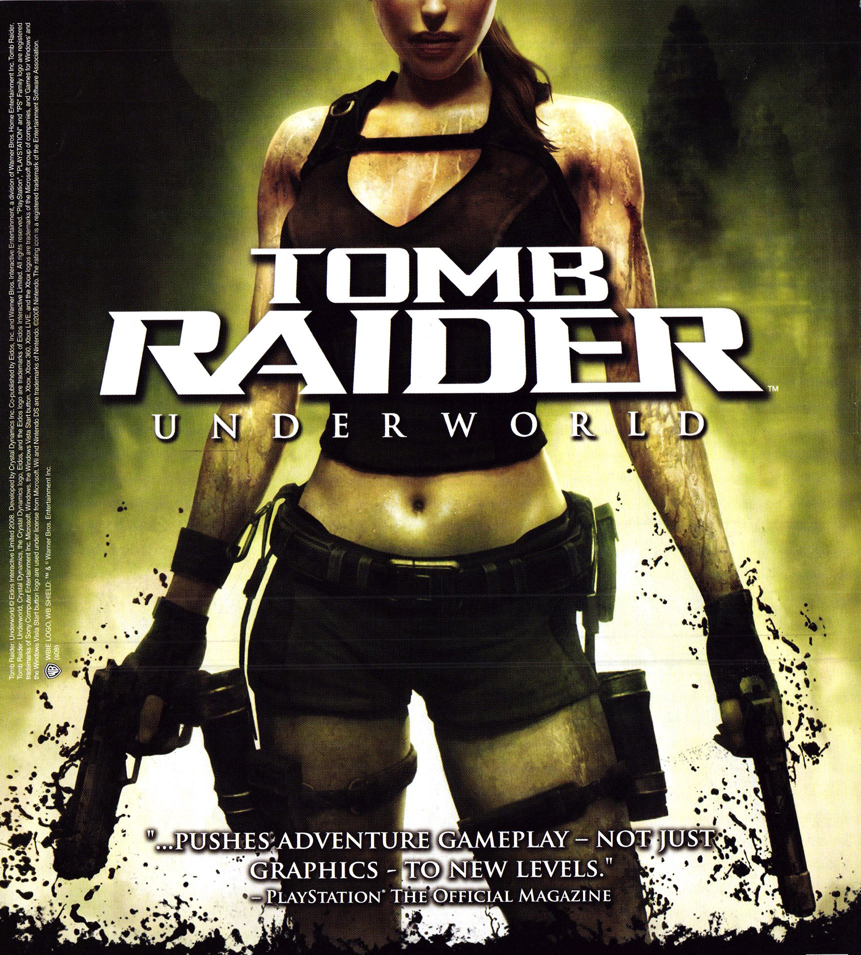

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